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COMMONWEAL

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A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

March 24, 2000

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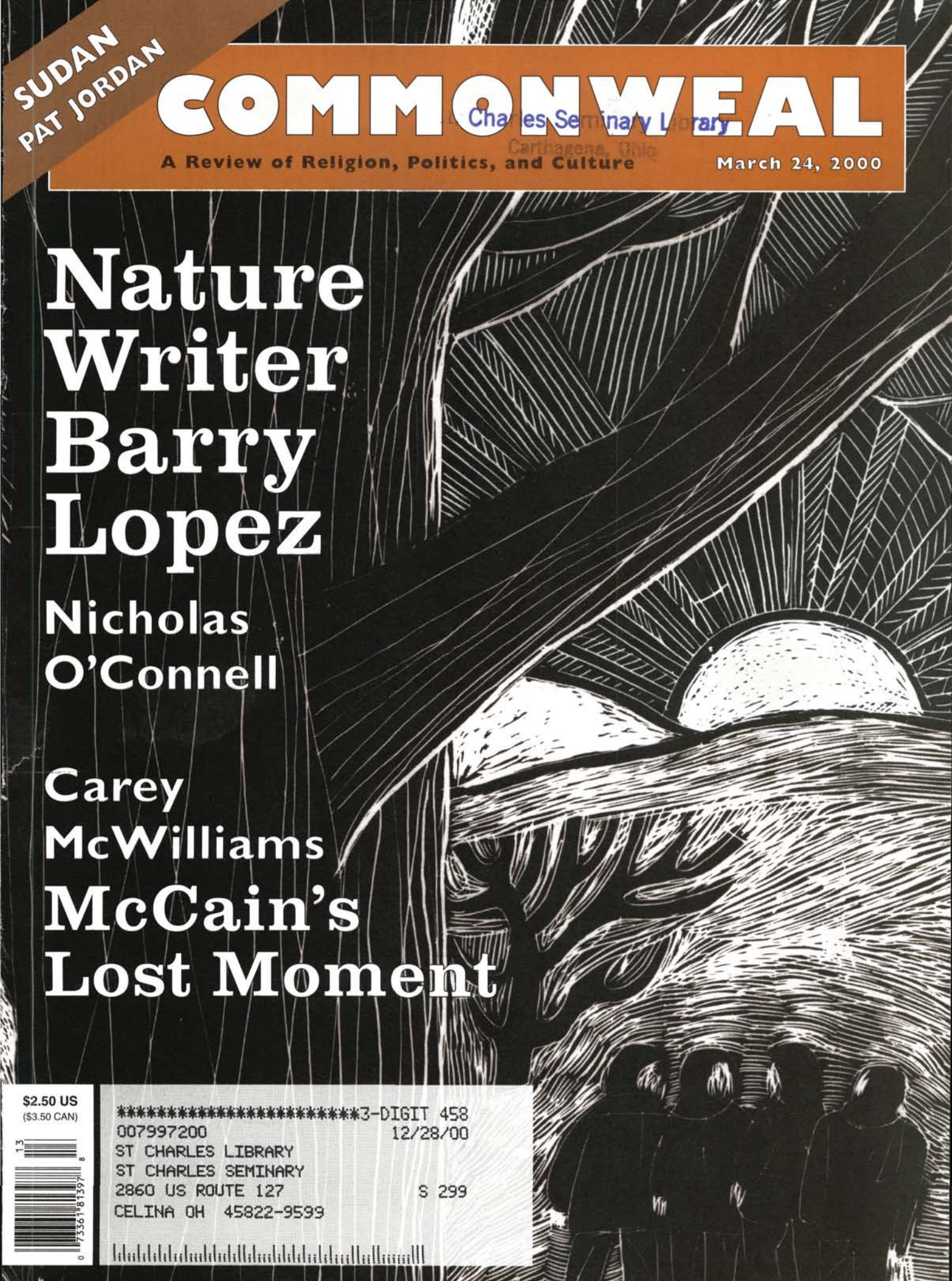
McCain's Lost Moment



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COMMONWEAL

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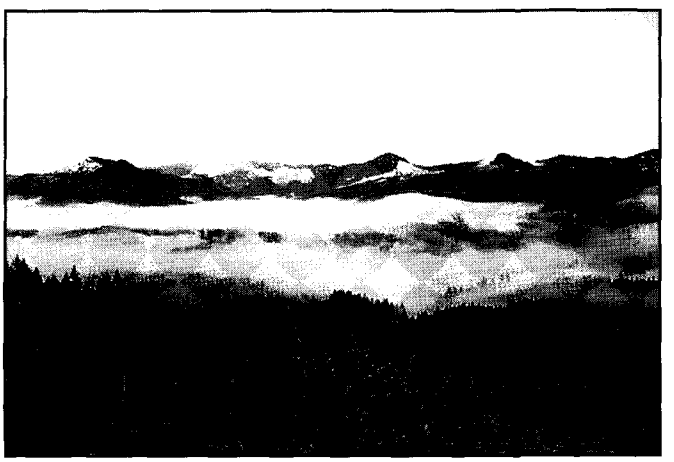

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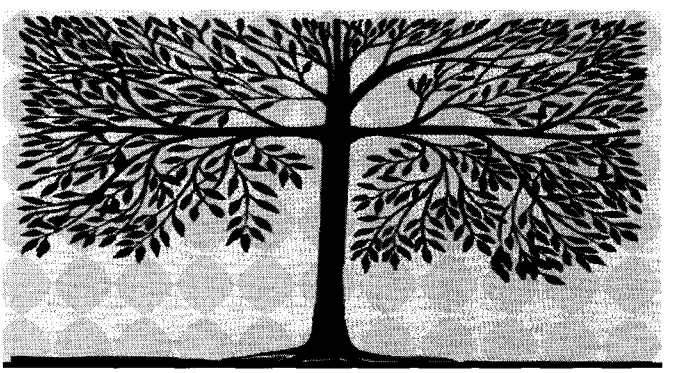

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To the Editors

Re: Mount Saint Mary's

In the February 11 issue of *Commonweal*, William L. Portier revisits an article of a year ago in the *New York Times Magazine*, "Why a Priest" by Jennifer Egan. Her article presented first-year seminarians at Mount Saint Mary's in Emmitsburg, Maryland, as conservative, almost anachronistic members of a new subculture. Portier offers a different explanation for their demeanor, of the way they live, and of how they think. He considers the seminarians evangelical rather than conservative.

But the distinction Portier makes between "conservative" and "evangelical" is not valid; the terms refer to entirely different things in common parlance about church matters. Portier explains the seminarians' actions as a form of evangelical witness for others to emulate. Wearing Roman collars, however, has not prevented clerics from espousing radical change in liturgy or church, nor has wearing "mufti," the jargon for nonclerical dress, inhibited conservative thinking.

None of these efforts at distinction, formation, propriety, or evangelism lends itself to dichotomy. Inspirational leaders build the church, enhance individual faith, and enable the revelation of God's will. Was Teresa of Avila a liberal or a conservative? What about Dorothy Day? Cardinal Bernardin? John Paul II? Each an evangelist, a living witness of the gospel, yet perceived by different people at different times as either conservative or liberal, heretic or saint.

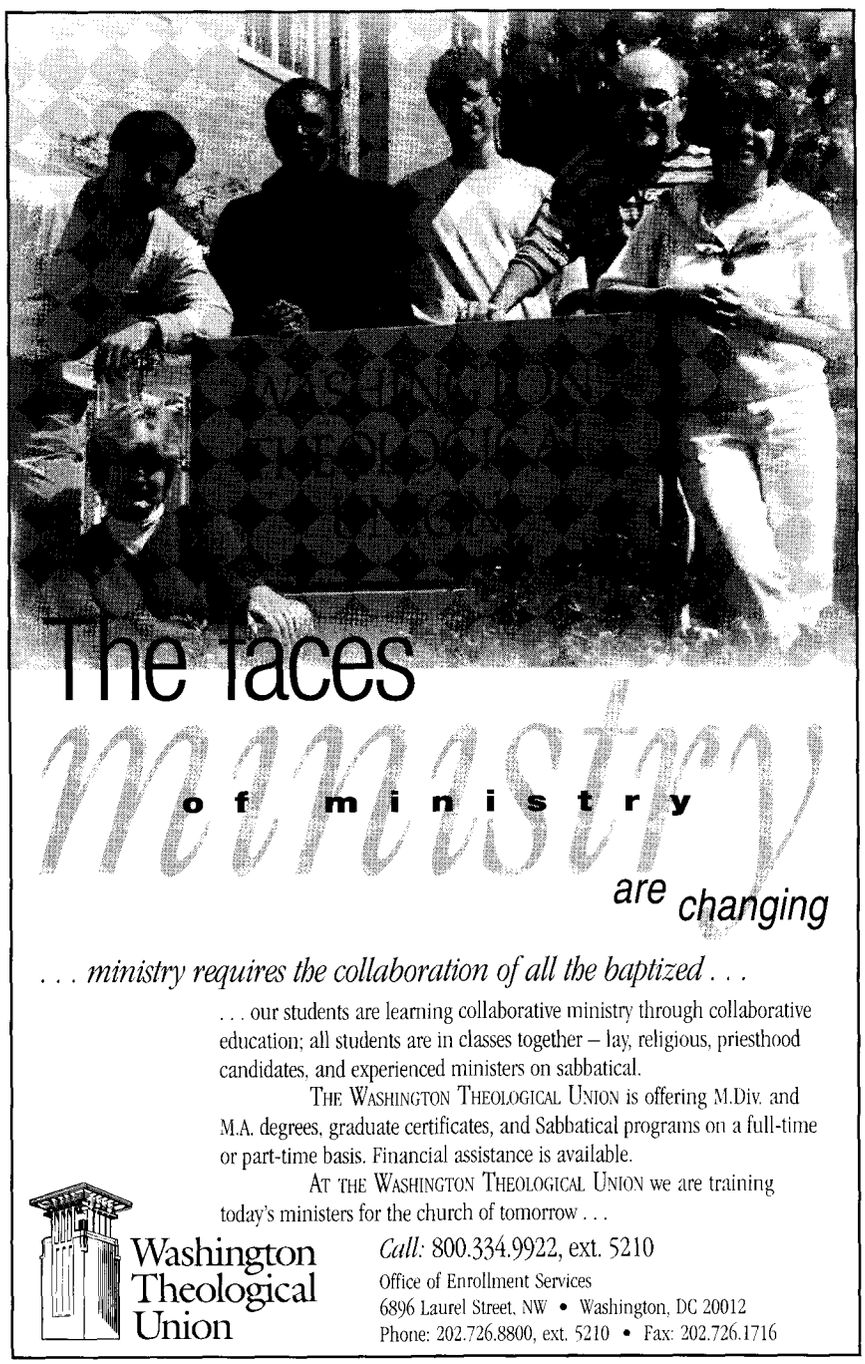
As divine mystery the church lives on in Christ, guided by sacred tradition and sacred Scripture as it is called into oneness with God. The human-divine tension of the church challenges us to continuously examine and renew our evangelism. Our efforts may call for us to be liberal at times and conservative at other times. Becoming locked into one or the other ecclesial camp can inhibit our ability to hear God's call, and its direction for us and for the church.

PETER S. MILLINGTON
Oakland, Calif.

Lonely crowd

I found William Portier's article ["In Defense of Mt. Saint Mary's"] even more troubling than the concerns raised by the original *New York Times Magazine* article that Portier was attempting to dissuade. It appears that the seminarians at Mount

(Continued on page 28)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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: commonweal@msn.com. Web: http://www.commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 475 Riverside Dr. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Commonweal, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 405, New York, NY 10115.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices.
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Single Copy, $2.50. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover design: Christopher Young; cover art: Rita Corbin; pp. 3, 14, Nicholas O'Connell; pp. 3, 20, ValuSoft; p. 3, Rita Corbin; p. 9, Kemchs, Rothco; p. 10, Gibb, Rothco; p. 11, Nancy Evelyn; p. 18, Courtesy of Belgian Federal Government On-line; columnist portraits, Elaine Mills.

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Hard cider

Combining the frivolous suspense of a game show and the solemnity of a coronation, the "Oscars" (March 26, this year) seem to have a little something for everyone not glued to "Mother Angelica Live." Given the self-promotional nature of the event, it is dangerous to read too much significance into which films are nominated or eventually awarded prizes. Social or cultural trends detected on Oscar night are often as skimpy as the outfits worn by some participants. That said, one of the movies nominated for best picture this year merits further scrutiny.

The Cider House Rules is an extended meditation on abortion, and it is a disturbing film for several reasons. Adapted for the screen by John Irving from his own novel, *The Cider House Rules* is by turns affectingly sentimental, sure about its own virtue, and more than a little troubling in the way its pragmatic philosophical message relies on violence to resolve human problems. Ultimately, it is a very manipulative film.

The story is set in an orphanage in Maine in the early 1940s. Dr. Wilbur Larch, the director of the orphanage, is an ornery soul and a skilled obstetrician, as dedicated to caring for the "abandoned" children left on his doorstep as he is to providing abortions for women who request them. Larch has trained Homer Wells, the eldest boy in the orphanage (and who hasn't been to high school, much less medical school), as an obstetrician and clearly sees him as his heir. One of Homer's chores, along with delivering babies, is to dispose of aborted fetuses in the backyard incinerator. However, young Homer will not perform abortions. This refusal infuriates Larch, who berates his protégé for misplaced scruples, always stressing that the first moral duty is "to be useful."

Inevitably, a teen-age victim of a botched abortion shows up at the orphanage and dies. Larch is outraged, and blames the girl's death on the "ignorance" and "silence" surrounding illegal abortion. "This is what doing nothing gets you," he reprimands Homer. "If she had come to you, what would you have done? Nothing."

It is not hard to see where this story is going (or why Planned Parenthood plans to use it at fundraisers). Homer leaves the orphanage and ends up working with migrant apple pickers. Eventually the world places another desperate woman in his path, only this time author Irving further stacks the deck by making her the victim of father-daughter incest. By this juncture Homer's earlier resolve has already been eroded by his own initiation into sexual passion and duplicity. The now more mature Homer, confronted with a woman who threatens to "fix it" herself, performs the abortion.

Homer's decision is presented as an initiation into manhood, his recognition that being morally responsible means being of "some use." Rules, especially moral rules touching on human relationships, are obstacles to be overcome when faced with the messy business of life, or so Irving wants us to believe. Trained in surgery, Homer simply had an obligation to perform the abortion. Never a subtle writer, Irving drives this point home again and again, while the worries of those who accuse Dr. Larch of "playing God" are dismissed out of hand. "Men and women of con-

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science," Larch tells Homer, "should seize these moments when we can play God." "I'm not sorry for anything I've done," he goes on. "You have to choose.... Someone's going to get hurt, and it's no one's fault."

The same message is also put into the mouth of the father who has committed incest. "The rules don't mean nothing at all," he tells us. "Someone who don't live here made those rules. We make our own rules—every single day."

Opponents of abortion on demand are frequently confronted with questions about incest and dangerous back-alley procedures. There are no easy answers to such challenges, although it is useful to be reminded that incest is involved in a minuscule number of abortions and that the number of deaths caused by illegal abortions before *Roe* has been wildly exaggerated. Allowing legal access to abortion in cases of rape, incest, or when a mother's life is in danger, is a morally defensible position. But none of these hard cases logically commit one to abortion on demand. The movie's insistence that physicians unwilling to perform abortions are morally responsible for the deaths of women who resort to knitting needles is just one example of how extreme Irving's view is.

More disturbing is the movie's sentimental fatalism about the inevitability of violence. Abortion, whatever one thinks of it morally, remains a violent act, and it lies at the dramatic center of the story. Incest is also violent, yet the movie coyly undermines the idea that there can be any strict accounting for—or any "rules" concerning—what the father has done. And when the father meets his own violent end, the same dynamic is at work; no one is really responsible. Finally, Dr. Larch's death, by an accidental drug overdose, is intended to seal the case against moral rule-making of any sort. Evil, it seems, is an impersonal force loosed in the world which no one need confront and for which there is no final answer. In short, in Dr. Larch's words, "Someone's going to get hurt, and it's no one's fault."

Opponents of abortion have long worried that in a society where 1.4 million fetuses are disposed of every year, respect for all life will inevitably coarsen and diminish. That concern is usually dismissed as idle speculation. But if the esteem in which *The Cider House Rules* is held is any indication, our common moral vocabulary may well be atrophying. At a minimum, it is bewildering that some critics call a movie that soft-pedals the crime of incest and elevates abortion to an absolute moral duty "a tribute to the human spirit." That its promoters imagine it to be an "American classic about family" is simply macabre. But where Irving's story is most dangerous is how it taps into the growing moral sentiment, spurred on by our scientific mastery of nature, that "men and women of conscience should seize these moments when we can play God."

There is no avoiding moral dilemmas in which all the choices may seem unsatisfactory. But how we approach such decisions will in large part determine whether we do harm or good. Certainly we must not "seize" these moments with the utilitarian fervor of Dr. Larch. To do so would be to lose sight of our innate limitations and the hard-won wisdom of moral tradition. Humility, awe, and a willingness to question our own motives are essential moral attitudes. We cannot "make up the rules every single day," for that, as *The Cider House Rules* unintentionally reveals, is an invitation to violence.

NOTEBOOK

EYE ON SUDAN

The forgotten war

When exiled Sudanese Bishop Macram Max Gassis introduced the documentary *The Hidden Gift: War and Faith in Sudan* at its premier at Fordham University Lincoln Center last month, he said the eighty-four-minute film was "an eye opener to the catastrophe that is happening in Sudan."

Last July, ABC's "Nightline" ran a half-hour segment on Sudan, "Making a Difference." It concentrated on the work of Dr. Susan Nagele, an Illinois-born Maryknoll lay missioner who has spent the past nine years working in remote outposts in southern Sudan. Sudan is Africa's largest country, and for the past seventeen years its 28 million people have been engulfed in civil war. The conflict pits an Islamic fundamentalist regime in the north, intent on imposing strict Islamic law on the entire country, against black African Christian and animist tribes in the south. The main rebel fighting contingent is known as the SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Army). Two million people have died—more than in Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Somalia *combined*—and 4 million more have been displaced.

ABC's cameras vividly conveyed the plight of one southern tribe, the Dinka, a herding people, among whom Nagele has ministered. The Dinka and their civilization are being systematically destroyed by aerial bombardment, famine, and enslavement. With fresh discoveries of oil in the south, the government in Khartoum has intensified its drive to crush the Dinka and other rebellious tribes.

The Catholic bishops of East Africa, in a joint statement last year, described the Sudanese war as one of "truly genocidal dimensions." In February, days before Bishop Gassis addressed his New York audience, BBC News Online carried live footage on its Web site of the immediate aftermath of a February 8 government bombing of a Catholic-sponsored primary school in Kauda, in the SPLA-controlled Nuba Mountains. Fourteen children, some of them Muslim, and their twenty-two-year-old teacher were killed; seventeen others were critically wounded, and Reuters reported ten were still missing. Immediately after the bombs struck, a student grabbed a battered camera and microphone and recorded the scene. In its commentary, the BBC stated: "The government of Sudan...wants investors for its potentially lucrative oil industry, and it would rather that people didn't know about places like this and the crimes that are committed."

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The Hidden Gift is a compelling film. Some of the color footage assembled by director David Tlapek is as vibrant as the photographs of Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher in their stunning two-volume *African Ceremonies* (Abrams, 1999). Tlapek couples live-action shots—some of them made at the very school that was later bombed—with exquisite black-and-white stills by James Nichols. The documentary was made on location during two surreptitious visits by the exiled Bishop Gassis to rebel-held areas during Christmas 1998 and Easter 1999. It follows Gassis, a native of Sudan who speaks fluent Arabic as well as idiomatic American, as he is welcomed home. Throngs greet him with drums and dancing; calves are slaughtered; the bishop converses with priests and catechists, a local SPLA commander, moderate Muslims, and ex-slaves he has helped free from bondage in the north. The camera rolls as Gassis unloads supplies at a clandestine airfield, and as he baptizes, confirms, and witnesses the marriages of scores of people, some of whom have not seen a priest in thirty years. During the joyous Christmas Mass, held beneath a panoply of shade trees in a dry riverbed, government bombers are reported to be on the way. The bishop informs the congregation to remain calm and the Mass continues. The sense of controlled terror is palpable. The camera records the people's resolute dignity. It also captures—for the last time—some of the students killed in last month's attack.

When Bishop Gassis introduced the documentary in New York, he told his audience that the school had been the only one operating in the entire region: "This is our life," he said, "this is the reality of our children." Then he added: "This heart-breaking incident is yet another piece of evidence...that the war in Sudan is a religious and ethnic war launched by Khartoum and aimed at the destruction of my people."

The catastrophe in Sudan is as complex as it is bloody (*see*, *Commonweal*, December 16, 1994; January 17, 1997). The SPLA, no shining peace force, has repeatedly split into fratricidal factions, skimmed off relief supplies, held aid workers hostage, and kidnapped young boys, forcing them into armed service. In calling for a negotiated settlement, the East African Bishops' Conference condemned not only the Sudanese government but the SPLA for sponsoring military groups "whose target of operation is usually the civilian population."

Is there hope for an end to the war? It will have to come from a combination of outside pressure and internal change. Both are in short supply. Last December, Khartoum seemed to be moving toward a more moderate stance. President Omar Bashir ousted longtime radical Speaker of Parliament Hassan Turabi. But since then they have made overtures of reconciliation. For its part, the SPLA remains unpredictable and divided. Some of Sudan's neighbors have turned from working on a solution to fighting among themselves (Ethiopia and Eritrea). While the United States maintains sanctions against Sudan as a terrorist state and cozies up to the SPLA, Canada declines to restrain its Talisman Energy firm from extracting Sudanese oil. The funds flow to Khartoum, enabling it to prolong the war. This month its planes bombed a hospital in the south, killing two and injuring a dozen, and also the compound of an Irish aid group.

Thus, the importance of voices like those of Bishop Gassis and Dr. Nagele, and of films like *The Hidden Gift* and "Making a Difference." They open eyes. PATRICK JORDAN

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE

Bare churches, cold hearts

Last week, at our Altar-Rosary Society meeting, I made a heartfelt request that we have vigil candles in church for people to light. Olga, a member who grew up in an Eastern Catholic church, agreed with me, but our request fell flat. The pastor cited the danger of fire, the cost of insurance, and the certainty of theft. I replied that as a rich parish we could afford to offer candles for free. And if we absolutely couldn't have real flames and smoke, electric candles would be better than nothing.

The pastor voiced surprise that I felt so strongly about keeping up this traditional Catholic devotion. My reasons are simple. Like a lot of other post-Vatican II folks in the pews, I miss something in our spare, moderne churches. They often feel downright chilly. Too often the Catholic tradition's witness to material sacramentality seems faint. Warmth, mystery, and transcendence aren't present. If this is a problem without a name, it's also one I don't know how to fix. A simple-minded imitation of the past won't do.

I could not join Camille Paglia's riff praising her childhood parish church with its statue of Saint Lucy offering her eyeballs on a plate. Nor would I want to import the mural I saw in a Spanish chapel which shows a female martyr's chopped-off breasts flying away in the air. Certain Mexican crucifixes come with far too much blood and gore. These, like the display of Saint Catherine of Siena's severed head, err in too grisly a direction. At the opposite extreme, we encounter excessive sentimentality. While worshiping in the small wooden summer chapel at Lake George, I counted fourteen images of Mary and her baby. I admired the excess and the feminine ambience, but the dreadful quality of the mass-produced art spoiled the effect. Even the monumental Marian shrine in Washington, D.C., replete with a plethora of elegant Byzantine images, feels cold and inauthentic to me.

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So missy, *Quo vadis*? Maybe I should concentrate less on my dissatisfactions and focus more on gratitude for how far I've come. As a teen-age convert to serious Christianity, I was a puritanical zealot. Nothing material should stand between God and the individual soul. A silent Quaker meeting was my ideal of worship. During this period I went to a sung high Mass one Christmas Eve, and actually shed tears at the sacrilegious superstition on display. Three priests in gold and silver vestments were bowing and turning round as they chanted the Latin service in a lavishly lit and adorned church. Bah, humbug, away with such pagan rites!

Such was the self-righteous spirit that led Cromwell's troops to smash stained glass and destroy statues all over the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the English Reformation's violent stripping of the altars influenced generations of American Protestants. My great-grandfather was a predestinarian Baptist preacher in south Alabama. His Shiloh congregation rejected the use of musical instruments as corrupt. Only voices could be raised in song. His small wooden church held no ornamentation, much less fourteen Madonnas.

Having finally grown up and been converted to the sacramental Roman way, I firmly renounce all past iconoclasm and want to go forward—or deeper. But forward does not mean accepting an aesthetic of functional minimalism. I don't want the Catholic church to be Bauhaused (an invented verb referring to ambush by sterile modern architecture). Concrete and glass-filled spaces should be limited to airports and shopping malls. Even our newest upscale mall has softened its modernist aura with atriums, fountains, and statues—befitting a capitalist cathedral. In a real cathedral or church my spirit expands if there are dim corners where worshipers can pray privately before illuminated icons and banks of vigil lights. Flickering lights and flickering prayers ascend together. How marvelous the wartime London churches looked in the movie *The End of the Affair*. Their glowing transcendent aura made it believable that the heroine might give up her lover for God.

Worshipers attend to a threefold reality. God is in the gathered body of the assembly, God is within, and God dwells in unapproachable light beyond. Vatican II teaches that "in the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." Yes, that's it; I have been late in grasping the vision of "the heavenly liturgy." My attention has been focused on the urgent need for justice and equality, in the church and in society. But I see now that it was the magnetic pull of "the Mass as heaven on earth" that brought me into the church and continues to nurture me. Without this transcendent eschatological dimension of worship, fully embodied in art, music, beauty, ritual, and sacred space, Cromwell wins.

Surely, the third Catholic millennium can find a way to renew our art and architecture. Yes, I know that places are made sacred by the celebrations, prayers, and charity of the believers who worship in them. But it also works the other way round: sacred spaces inspire and inform worship. A Mass celebrated on the back of a jeep in a battlefield, or on a linoleum-covered table in a homeless shelter can be true worship. But habitual exposure to the stripped-down aesthetic of a school cafeteria or supermarket presents peculiar difficulties for the spirit. If we can't have Chartres come again, at least we can have good art, good music, and many candles. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

WILLIAM PFAFF

PEACE IN KOSOVO?

Not yet & not likely

The precarious situation in the town of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo, now partitioned between Serbs and ethnic Albanians, demonstrates the fragility of the international community's policy to establish a multiethnic government in Kosovo. Here, as in Bosnia in 1995, NATO made war to undo ethnic cleansing and partition. This admirable ambition has since met endless difficulties and frustrations in both places, imposing doubt as to its realism. Yet what is the alternative, even in purely expedient terms?

NATO placed Mitrovica under French zonal command, assuming that the substantial Serbian population would trust the French to protect them from the revenge of Albanians, earlier driven away by Serbian forces and marauders. The French unwisely allowed the Serbs to partition the town. This left looted Albanian apartments and some isolated Albanian residents in Serb-controlled northern Mitrovica, and a few Serbs in the southern part of the town, dominated by the returning Albanians. Since then, NATO forces have struggled to separate the Albanians, demanding their property in the north, and bands of Serbs, teleguided from Belgrade, blockading their part of Mitrovica with the aim of creating a de facto cantonization and eventual partition of all Kosovo.

Serb expansionism and "greater Albania" ambitions collide in this struggle. Albanian activists are harassing the Kosovo Serbs in order to drive them into Serbia. Albanian radicals have reportedly infiltrated Serbia itself in an effort to control Albanian-populated towns inside the country. Yugoslav military forces are massing just across the frontier from the American-controlled zone of Kosovo, a potentially explosive situation.

The Western powers have had small successes in disarming hatred and installing multiethnic institutions. Sarajevo is one such success, but Sarajevo was a liberal and cosmopolitan city before Yugoslavia's destruction began. The pre-

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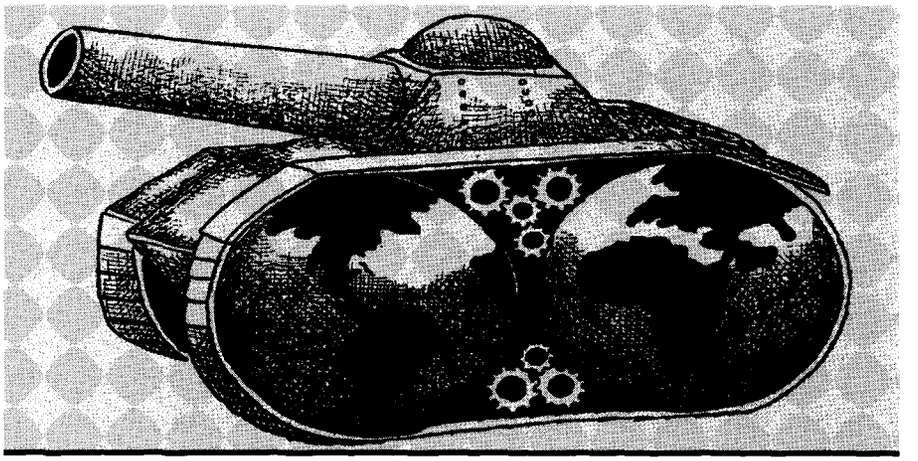
war situation has merely been restored. The hope that Sarajevo would provide the model for the rest of the Moslem-Croat Federation of Bosnia, not to speak of the Republika Srpska, has been mostly disappointed.

The UN's special representative in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, concedes that Kosovo's Serb and Albanian populations probably "will indeed prefer to live separately for a period." He argues, however, that "history shows that divided cities and divided communities reunite eventually." This, I think, has only limited truth in describing events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It would seem a basic principle, or simple realism, to say that it is legitimate for people with a common cultural heritage to want to live in their own state. The problem is feasibility.

If it can be accomplished peacefully, fine. The reality is that Woodrow Wilson's idealistic notion of national self-determination for all has come about in Central and Eastern Europe mainly through war, persecution, population transfers, redrawn borders, and with immense human suffering.

Successful multiethnic nations have, in modern times, mostly been the creations of settlers and immigrants, at the expense of indigenous peoples (the United States, Canada, Australia). Multicultural immigration in the two most successful immigrant nations, France and the United States, has depended on the existence of powerful and culturally assimilative national ideologies.



The international community's decision to establish multiethnic societies in Kosovo and Bosnia is extremely ambitious, more so than most were willing to admit (or even understood) when the policy was established. In the short term, the international community has no alternative to pressing on to establish liberal, ethnically neutral political institutions in those societies, counting such successes as come, and resisting the continuing effort of the Milosevic government to exploit ethnic division in both places.

Whether this will provide a permanent solution, successfully uniting warring communities, is another matter. One would like to think so, but it would be unwise to count on success. The patience, persistence, and armed presence of the international community will, for the foreseeable future, remain indispensable. □

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Wilson Carey McWilliams

PRIMARY LESSONS

What McCain taught us

Super Tuesday, in John McCain's *Star Wars* metaphor, was *The Empire Strikes Back:* a victory for money, bureaucracy, and technique with no surprises and not much good news for the rebels.

Partisan Democrats, of course, find considerable comfort in the outcome: George W. Bush, the inevitable Republican nominee, is damaged goods, an almost unanswerable reason for swallowing one's doubts and voting for Al Gore. And Gore, who looked like a sure loser at the beginning of the year, has turned into a better campaigner and the favorite to win in November.

Bush began with a first-rate slogan, "compassionate conservatism," aiming to capture the political center, and he did well so long as his alleged use of cocaine dominated the media. But when the focus of the campaign shifted from what Bush had *done* to what he was *for*, Bush became impossibly vague. His own incapacities aside, this was a matter of strategy, a pragmatic determination to present Bush as a candidate who could win precisely because of his lack of baggage. Of course, the Texas governor wound up looking weak and vacuous, Dan Quayle with a smirk. And when he lurched right in order to win South Carolina, Bush reinforced the belief that he is simply a suit for all seasons. After his appearance at Bob Jones University began to be challenged, Bush protested that he is not anti-Catholic, a response that misses the broader political point, which is not his personal beliefs but his willingness to suppress or mold those beliefs in the pursuit of short-term political advantage. There are plenty of worries about Bush's debts to the Republican Right, but no one is worried that he is Ian Paisley. The more dangerous concern is that he is a kind of conservative hippy, too adaptable to do more than go with the flow. And ironically, his campaign's efforts to shake this image by reinventing Bush the centrist will only confirm it, at least for those who are watching.

The real winner in Bush's victories is the Christian Coalition and, to some extent, the Religious Right generally. Last

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"Such an obedient dog, that George W."

year, religious conservatives were in retreat, smarting from the impeachment debacle and increasingly regarded in Republican circles as a political albatross. When Ralph Reed and Pat Robertson attached themselves to Bush, it appeared to be just this side of surrender, a willingness to accept a candidate who was distancing himself from the Right at just about every turn. Perhaps they were just lucky; perhaps they recognized Bush's malleable vulnerability; in any case, the religious conservatives have demonstrated that while they cannot nominate a Republican candidate of their choosing, given any kind of interparty contest, they can probably decide the winner, whatever problems that causes later on.

Unfortunately, the influence of the Right may work to discourage mainstream Republicans from trying to reverse the tendency toward open primaries. It ought to be clear that there is something wrong with allowing people who are not members of a party to play a possibly decisive role in that party's decisions, especially since for the electorate, membership involves no commitment beyond a verbal declaration. Yet those Independents and Democrats who cross over into Republican primaries do add weight against the Right, and for Republicans interested in winning elections, that may be decisive: originally, the open primary in Michigan that John McCain won was designed as a protection for George Bush against a *conservative* insurgency. This year's anxieties, however, may cause Republican leaders not to multiply such experiments.

Democrats could have had a similar problem: Bill Bradley attracted Independents and even a few Republicans, though not enough to make the difference between winning and losing. Had the Republican race not been so competitive, Bradley's crossover vote might have been larger, but at bottom, Bradley's support was Democratic in a way that John McCain's was not Republican. As he realized late in the day, Bradley's best chance was to appeal to the Liberal Left, where Democratic discontents run strong. But Bradley's efforts in that direction were only marginally effective. Bradley, after all, in not a man of the Left; he is divided from Al Gore only by paper-thin distinctions. On trade issues, for example, Gore and Bradley were peas in a pod, both defenders of globalization and inclined to meek accommodation with China. The sparks in the Bradley-Gore contest were the result of egos more than issues, and compared to the Republican brawl, the Democratic race was as well-mannered as a cricket match. Democrats emerged from Super-Tuesday relatively united and much amused by the Republicans' troubles.

Still, Democrats have reason to be watchful, and not just because so many things can go wrong between now and November. In a three-way race, a poll taken just before Super Tuesday indicated that Bush and Gore would each get about 33 percent of the vote; McCain would get a quarter. The poll also indicated that beyond that core third of the electorate, Gore's current support is negative, discontented, and potentially up for grabs.

While John McCain's wit and candor helped him considerably, voters also were drawn to him by more fundamental concerns. Millions of Americans *care* that contemporary politics is so thoroughly dominated by money. Some are hopeful, like those drawn to McCain, some resigned, but all are resentful at the loss of something like a civic birthright. Similarly, while McCain's remedies were mostly inadequate or half-baked, he was also the only candidate to devote any serious attention to our radical and escalating inequality. Bradley and Gore talked, more or less seriously, about helping Americans with low incomes, but that compassionate liberalism falls short of a devotion to civic equality and community. And when Republican leaders chose to demonize McCain—otherwise a very conservative fellow partisan—rather than risk any reduction of the party's perennial advantage in fundraising or to surrender the improbable (and broadly unpopular) promise of a massive tax cut, they were virtually waving the banner of class, that dirty secret of our politics.

McCain's campaign reminded us that politics can be both for real and for fun; his leadership is flawed, to be sure, but strong and lively and evidently human, not a script prepackaged in focus groups or cyberspace. He offered a voice—sometimes murmuring, often incoherent—calling us back to democratic politics. In that sense, he wasn't Luke Skywalker so much as Princess Leia reminding Obi-Wan Kenobi of a half-forgotten past. We can at least hope that Al Gore was listening. □

Wilson Carey McWilliams, *a regular contributor, is the author of* Beyond the Politics of Disappointment? American Elections 1980–98 *(Chatham House).*

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AT ONE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

Barry Lopez's adventure with the word & the wild

Nicholas O'Connell

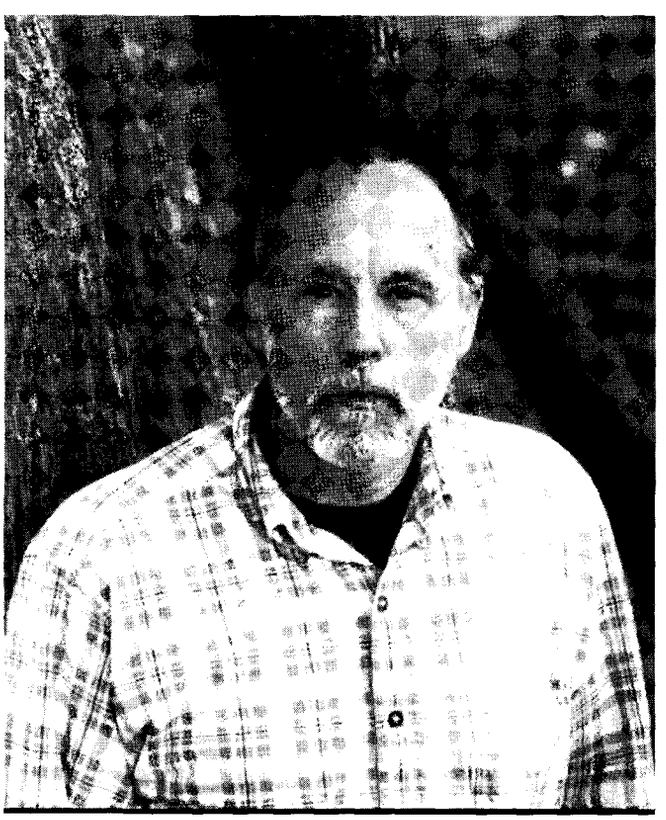
They never saw it coming. Barry Lopez and three scientists were making bottom trawls in a twenty-foot boat several miles out from Pingok Island on the North Slope of Alaska, one of the most desolate and remote regions of the planet. Skirting the edges of the pack ice in the Beaufort Sea, they concentrated on their work and ignored a storm moving in from the southwest. Before they realized what was happening, the wind pushed a large ice floe toward them, sealing them off from open water and pinning the craft on four sides.

Lopez and the others had prepared for such an emergency. In addition to scientific equipment, they carried flares, extra food, extra clothing, a tent, sleeping bags, and other survival equipment, including a radio. But they realized that, even if someone heard their distress signal, they had no way of describing their present location, and, with the storm moving in, they had no idea of how far the pack ice might drift to the east. Lest they become yet another footnote in the long record of Arctic disasters, they had to find a way to get free.

Taking advantage of a momentary shift in the ice, they managed to force the boat through a narrow passage. They widened the passage with ice chisels and gunned the boat's twin ninety-horsepower engines, trying desperately to reach open water. When thirty feet of ice stood in their way, they used ice anchors, lines, and a block and tackle to pull the 3,000-pound craft out of the water, across the ice and into the next channel.

But this channel, too, was closing. Lopez went to look for another escape route. Several hundred yards ahead, he raised his ice chisel to signal that he had found one. By the time the boat reached him, however, this channel had narrowed. One of the men positioned the prow of the boat against the seaward ice, revved the engines, and widened the gap to six feet. Then he reversed course and sped up the channel. The others chopped madly at the ice, trying to keep it away from the props. Finally, they heaved and lifted and shoved the boat into the open water. They were home free—or so they thought. They fell into the boat, exhausted from the effort. The seas were now running at six feet. Waves burst over the top of the boat. The men erected a canvas shelter to shield themselves from the water and hunkered down to endure the ride back to Pingok. Like the others, Lopez was dressed in heavy clothes and foul weather gear, but unbeknownst to him, he had torn the seams in the shoulder of his parka while freeing the boat. The right side of his body was soaked.

He shivered and drifted in and out of consciousness, unaware of what was happening and why he was so cold. Fortunately, the others recognized his predicament. They peeled off his wet garments, dressed him in dry wool clothing, and pushed him underneath the tarp to protect him from the elements. He sat in a stupor and simply tried to brace himself against the boat. When the others shouted that they had reached Pingok, he realized he was safe. He dragged himself out of the boat and into the camp, where he ate dinner and fell asleep.



Nicholas O'Connell, *a freelance writer in Seattle, is the author of* At the Field's End: Interviews with Twenty-two Pacific Northwest Writers *(University of Washington Press, 1998).* *This profile is the third in a series examining the lives of men and women who in their work or art struggle with the fundamental tensions of religious belief and practice in the modern world.* *The research and writing of this profile are supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.*

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After the storm passed, Lopez walked the beach and reflected on the incident. A fit, strong, barrel-chested man used to living and working outdoors, he felt embarrassed at being reduced to a dead weight, but the close call made him marvel at the early Arctic explorers who had endured much greater hardships, traversing the forbidding landscape in flimsy crafts without adequate clothing or survival equipment. In the sixth century Saint Brendan set off from the west coast of Ireland in a small currach made of wicker and oxhide to search for the Isles of the Blessed. What drove him to cross the Arctic landscape in such an exposed boat? After pondering the example of Brendan and other Arctic explorers, Lopez later concluded in *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986), a National Book Award-winner: "Arctic history became for me, then, a legacy of desire—the desire of individual men to achieve their goals. But it was also the legacy of a kind of desire that transcends heroics and which was privately known to many—the desire for a safe and honorable passage through the world."

This desire for a safe and honorable passage through the world animates not only Arctic history, but also Lopez himself. Each of his twelve books of fiction and nonfiction represents a search for such a passage. Though he's known primarily as a nature writer, his work always poses large ethical questions: What does it mean to lead a dignified and virtuous life? How are we to treat others, especially the weak and powerless among us? What are our responsibilities toward the nonhuman world? Such questions pervade his fiction and nonfiction, from early works such as *Desert Notes: Reflections in the Eye of a Raven* (1976) to *About This Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory* (1998).

In a postmodern culture where the possibility of knowledge is often denied and a glib nihilism frequently prevails, Lopez offers a refreshing sense of hope and possibility. His work attempts to reconcile an intimate and scientific knowledge of the physical world with Christian virtues of hope, dignity, and charity.

Lopez prefers to set his stories in remote, sometimes desolate locales—the Arctic, the Antarctic, the Galapagos Islands, the Sonoran Desert—but, important as the physical environment is to his narratives, they finally turn on issues of metaphysics. What are the trustworthy patterns in this life? How can we discern them? How can we overcome our propensity to doubt? In a postmodern culture where the possibility of knowledge is often denied and a glib nihilism frequently prevails, Lopez offers a refreshing sense of hope and possibility. His work attempts to reconcile an intimate and scientific knowledge of the physical world with Christian virtues of hope, dignity, and charity. This effort to yoke together such seemingly disparate traditions grows out of his Roman Catholic upbringing and his Jesuit and University of Notre Dame education. As he puts it: "I grew up in a Roman Catholic tradition, and was deeply affected by it. The part that affected me was the tradition of the Desert Fathers, the Jesuits, and the monastic tradition—not the things one normally hears about Catholicism. An image I have from childhood is of a group of men and women praying somewhere in the desert, and the reason chronically myopic and selfish people have not destroyed us with nuclear weapons is that, in a rarefied and metaphorical way, there have been these enclaves of monastics praying. What keeps these things from exploding, perhaps, is that each of us in his own way is saying his prayers."

Lopez's attempt to address issues of ethics and spirituality through stories about the natural world makes his work of particular interest to Catholics. "Barry Lopez's works have a profound relationship with Catholic thought," says Thomas Berry, Passionist priest, author of *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (1999), and the leading Catholic figure in the field of ecology and spirituality. "His is one of the best achievements of what you might call Western Christian thinking. He has such an intimate presence with the world of nature, with the animal world, with the landscape, with the entire range of natural phenomenon. He's deeply sensitive to how the human mind and emotions meet with the reality of the nonhuman. He understands profoundly the manner in which humans and the natural world are present in a single community of existence."

Lopez's vision of community as encompassing the nonhuman as well as the human world is central to that of an emerging movement in Catholic theology and social teaching. "Questions of ecology and environment loom very large in Catholic theology today," says Walter E. Grazer, director of the Environmental Justice Program at the U.S. Catholic Conference. "What is the place of the human in nature? What does it mean to care for creation? Religious communities are bringing out the dimension that we are stewards of the earth. We have an obligation of respect and reverence because it's God's creation."

Global warming. Acid rain. Species extinction. Groundwater contamination. Heavy metals pollution. Soil erosion. The signs are clear, according to Lopez, that we have failed in our stewardship of the earth. A growing number of religious leaders, theologians, and lay people look to his work and that of other nature writers for a sense of how to achieve a respectful, responsible relationship with the planet. As

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one of the leading figures in a field including Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry, Peter Matthiessen, and Terry Tempest Williams, Lopez has helped spark a crucial debate about the systematic destruction of the global environment and what churches and other religious communities should do about it.

It was winter in western Oregon. Gray clouds moved inland from the coast, leaving a dusting of snow on the foothills of the Cascade Mountains and a fine sheen of rain on the lower forests of alder, Douglas fir, Western hemlock, and Western red cedar. Fluorescent green moss hung from the trees, clung to their bark, and filled the cracks in the pavement along Highway 126, which hugs the banks of the McKenzie River. Wood smoke curled from the chimneys of houses. Logging trucks roared by on their way to a mill outside of Eugene. Strings of Christmas lights, plastic Santas, and illuminated crèches brightened the somber landscape.

Despite the chilly weather, Lopez drove his 1989 gray Toyota 4Runner with the sunroof open, letting the winter air wash over him. Dressed warmly in a green Patagonia jacket, brown scarf, purple shirt, blue jeans, and brown cowboy boots, he didn't seem bothered by the cold. Instead, like a wolf enmeshed in its world, he reveled in the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations around him.

Lopez had spent the morning running errands, taking a break from typing up his latest manuscript, *Light Action in the Caribbean*, a collection of short stories. He still pecks away at an IBM Selectric. He doesn't own a computer. "It's not an opposition to them," he explained. "They don't offer me anything as a writer." He works out of a two-bedroom cedar-shake house overlooking the river; he and his wife Sandra bought it thirty years ago. After the couple divorced recently, Lopez discouraged anyone from visiting the place, including me, someone who has known him and followed his work for fifteen years. An intensely private man, almost monkish in his devotion to solitude, he apologetically explained, "There's a stillness there I want to preserve."

Lopez was perfectly willing, however, to provide a tour of what he calls his "neighborhood," the forested slopes along the McKenzie River. "I'm in trouble if I'm in my room too much," he admitted. "I try to immerse myself in this place. I walk the road. I just drift."

Shells, feathers, cedar boughs, and rocks cover the dashboard of his truck. These gifts from native peoples serve as a way of bringing the outside world into the truck. Parkas, clothing, and outdoor equipment fill the back seats. Lopez stopped on a bluff above the river to point out a blue highway sign directing how cutting, spraying, and maintenance work should be done to minimize disturbance to spawning salmon. "Two hundred fifty thousand salmon once came up the Willamette," he said somberly. "Now that number is down to a thousand, about nine hundred of which spawn on the McKenzie near my property."

After letting that sink in, he drove across a wooden bridge and turned onto Pond Road, a gravel track winding through old-growth forest. The truck crept along in first gear, allowing him to spot a bird flitting through the undergrowth, a newly fallen tree, a collection of alder branches stripped of their bark by the beavers that live on Quartz Creek—all the recent doings of the neighborhood.

"You can get an idea of the succession by looking down there," he pointed to the trees along the river. "Cottonwood, alder, Douglas fir," he pronounced the names as if they were old friends. As the truck passed through the drippy, filtered light of the forest canopy, Lopez enumerated the local plants—"sword fern, bracken fern, deer fern, licorice fern."

As the truck passed out of the Willamette National Forest the old growth gave way to gravel washes, alder thickets, and new second-growth trees.

"They just butchered up to the national forest," he said, shaking his head. Lopez continued up a logging road to a high point above the valley. He parked, got out of the truck, and surveyed the clearcut-scarred Cascade foothills.

"It's difficult to see this because it fills me with grief," he said, indicating the cutover valley that provides habitat for beaver, elk, deer, mountain lion, lynx, skunk, bobcat, salmon, as well as human beings. "I have a constant sense of grief about the relationships destroyed by all this. Ecology is not just about endangered species. It's about community. It's about relationships. You can't have a consumption-based culture unless you have an immoral relationship with nonhuman species."

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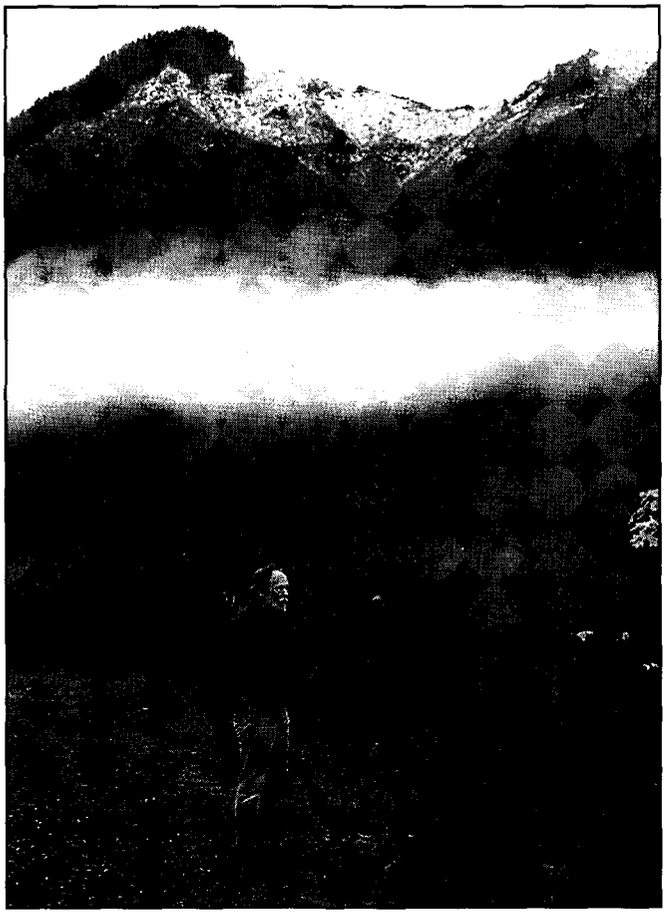

The winter light was fading. Lopez lingered for a few moments before getting back in the truck. He fingered the truck key strung with steel wire and a climber's metal chock. "As soon as I turn the key," he said sadly, "I've bought into this whole lifestyle." Then he turned the key, started the truck, and drove back down into the gathering darkness.

Lopez's sensitivity to the plight of the McKenzie River Valley and the rest of the nonhuman world grew out of his early upbringing in Southern California. He was born in 1945 in Port Chester, New York, but three years later his family moved to the northern San Fernando Valley. The rural landscape there made a lasting impression on him.

"Adventure unfolded in fruit orchards and wisteria hedges, in horse pastures and haylofts, and around farming operations, truck gardens, and chicken ranches," he wrote in *About This Life*. "We rode our bikes out as far as Porter Ranch, the rural fringes of valley settlement where braceros worked the fields and where encounters with coyotes, jackrabbits, and even rattlesnakes were not unusual."

At five, after his parents divorced, Lopez turned to the natural world for solace. By foot and bike, he explored the local farms, rivers, and mountains. His mother encouraged this appreciation of landscape, taking him and his younger brother Dennis to the Mojave Desert, the Santa Monica Mountains, Zuma Beach, Big Bear Lake, Hoover Dam, and the Grand Canyon. These trips encouraged a sensitivity to what he calls "classical" landscapes—deserts, the Arctic, and the Antarctic. It was wrenching for him at age eleven when his family took up residence in Manhattan, after his mother remarried. Gone were the orchards, truck farms, and grasslands of his childhood.

But Lopez gained much in the process. He attended Loyola, a Jesuit prep school on the Upper East Side, where he studied Latin, history, English literature, French, art, and science. He came to revel in the heady intellectual atmosphere of New York City.

After graduation, he went on to the University of Notre Dame. Ron Weber, a professor in American studies there, remembers him as "a strong student—intense, independent, ambitious—within a group of other strong students who took writing seriously and had genuine intellectual interests." Lopez got a solid grounding in the liberal arts, but enjoyed studying philosophy and theology most.

He was not only a good student and a varsity soccer player, but also a devout young man who considered entering a monastery. He went as far as visiting Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, where the Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton lived, in 1966. "That's the point at which I made the decision that I wasn't going to go into a monastery," he said. "The work I wanted to do with my life—I didn't have anything specific in mind—I was going to do outside. The monastic life is very attractive to me, probably more as an abstraction than as a reality."

Though he decided against monastic life, he found the austere lifestyle an important model. He came to understand his writing as a kind of prayer, his way of living a virtuous life outside the monastery. "Prayer is a way to formalize in a conventional sense with language the relationship between yourself and a spiritual entity or entities," he says. "But I think of prayer as larger than that; in the monastic traditions your work is your prayer. There must be moments in your life when you are saying your prayers better, and that's what writing is for me."

Lopez subsequently married and moved West. He entered the University of Oregon's graduate program in English, hoping to use it to jump-start his writing career. But he found the program pretentious and dropped out after the first semester. He did, however, meet an important mentor in Professor Barre Toelken, a specialist in folklore, who introduced him to North American Indian myths.

"Toelken pointed me toward anthropological research which demonstrated that other cultures approached questions of natural history and geography in the same way I preferred," he said. "They did not separate humanity and nature. They recognized the divine in both."

Lopez became fascinated with Coyote, the trickster figure of Native American stories. He pored over the Coyote tales, analyzed their structure, and learned how to make the land come alive through story. His first published book, *Desert Notes*, shows the influence of these tales. It synthesizes many aspects of his background: his early memories of

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Southern California deserts, his inclination toward desert monasticism, and his interest in Coyote tales.

This spare, sensual, paradoxical work serves as the blueprint for the rest of his oeuvre. Like most of his stories, it is organized around a quest, with the central character journeying into a desert to gain wisdom and learning from people and animals native to it. The book opens with the unnamed narrator stating his desire to discover the secrets of the desert, much as the desert father Saint Anthony sought to know God through prayer, fasting, and self-mortification: "The land does not give easily. The desert is like a boulder. You expect to wait. You expect night to come. Morning. Winter to set in. But you expect sometime it will loosen into pieces to be examined. When it doesn't, you weary."

The narrator senses that the place contains mysterious dimensions. He wants to unlock these secrets quickly, but the landscape frustrates these attempts. Only when he approaches it in a humble, oblique, and respectful manner does it reveal itself to him. Then he can enter into communion with it. At the end of the introduction, the narrator observes: "One morning as I stood watching the sun rise, washing out the blue black, watching the white crystalline stars fade, my bare legs quivering in the cool air, I noticed my hands had begun to crack and turn to dust."

The narrator's patience is rewarded as his hands are transformed into the stuff of the desert landscape, symbolizing his communion with it. Just as the Jewish people in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus and John the Baptist in the New Testament strengthened and purified themselves in the desert, so too the narrator of *Desert Notes* comes to life through the discipline of the harsh environment. This is a common theme in Lopez's books, articles, and stories: Journeys into the wilderness provide us with a chance to return to an original, uncompromised spiritual self, a self often buried beneath the conventions and distractions of modern urban life.

Desert Notes is an excellent introduction to Lopez's work. Many of his narrative strategies find their first expression here: the identification of the narrator as a seeker after the spiritual secrets of the landscape; the narrator's application of perspectives from biology and anthropology to get closer to the heart of this mystery; and, finally, the narrator's change in attitude as he comes into contact with the mystery. Treating the environment as a metaphor as well as a subject, these strategies pushed the limits of nature writing. Lopez's willingness to address issues of dignity, tolerance, morality, and spirituality in terms of the nonhuman world soon caught the attention of the larger literary world.

"He's a nature writer, but he has philosophic and metaphysical overtones," said Lewis Lapham, the editor of *Harper's*, one of the first national magazines to publish Lopez's work. "He's trying for a synthesis of the spirit and the material. There's a connection in his work between the physical and metaphysical. He likes to ask the question 'Why?' as well as 'What?'"

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The Way of Heaven

He contemplates the patterns of rose
and chrysanthemum beginning
to wear thin at that section
of carpet upon which
he tends to walk

most frequently. Where fallen petals
cover a surface of indeterminate
depth, and acacia trees
catch the wind, he sees men
with conical hats

that shade their faces emerge
from the threadbare whiteness.
They move closer the less he tries
to keep them in focus, pilgrims
from a far-off country

come to drink from a Holy Well.
Their presence helps to calm him
when he feels uneasy, teaches him
to look for release
when the way seems

to narrow, and in the darkest hour
of night they lead him toward
their gleaming city, existing
beyond a range of seemingly
impenetrable mountains.

Michael Jewell

Lopez's use of natural history as a springboard for discussing larger issues is part of what makes him so highly regarded as an author. Most nature writers address only ecological issues, but Lopez uses natural history to broach questions about everything from living a virtuous life to responsibilities toward a community.

"It's hard for me to imagine a contemporary writer more sacramental and incarnational than Barry Lopez," says Douglas Burton-Christie, associate professor of Christian spirituality at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and author of *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (1993). "The way he studies something carefully, intensively, and then articulates it so that a reader can feel its power reflects the mystery of the Incarnation, that God has taken human flesh in the form of Christ. His writing is filled with sacramentality: the idea that ordinary physical things mediate the holy. I'd be hard-pressed to think of a theologian giving us a more powerful vision of those issues."

By addressing such issues in terms of landscape, Lopez follows a long tradition in American literature. Melville's *Moby Dick*, Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," and Thoreau's *Walden* pose similar questions in the same way. But where Thoreau and other Trancendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson considered nature divine, Lopez considers it simply one manifestation of God's presence, though he admits to recognizing that presence more easily in nature than in human society. His sense of the sacramental quality of nature, its ability to mediate between the human and the divine, accounts for his work's resemblance to that of Catholic writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins.

"To me a 'Catholic writer' is someone who uses the concerns and/or traditions of the Catholic faith in his or her work," says Brian Doyle, a friend of Lopez and the editor of *Portland Magazine*, "either as setting and costumed character, like J.F. Powers's priests, or discernible in the relentless pursuit of the Christ in the most troubled and odd of us (Flannery O'Connor), or in the heartfelt urge to portray the very Catholic notion of an ocean of grace available to us in our brokenness and struggle (Andre Dubus)."

Barry is clearly a man of Catholic nature, says Doyle, "always trying to draw his fellow travelers and sufferers and supplicants together in a community alert to its responsibility to the least of God's creatures. The idea that the world is suffused with divine grace, that God is *in* everything (not that God *is* everything, which is pantheism) and thus all things are precious and priceless and holy, is at the root of the man's work. His themes are finally responsibility, community, grace, and love, and of these the greatest is love—as Saint Paul says."

Despite its Catholic qualities, Lopez's work has gained renown primarily as natural history, not religious literature. His 1978 book, *Of Wolves and Men*, won the prestigious John Burroughs Medal for nature writing and earned Lopez a reputation as one of the most promising young figures in the field. The work goes much further than previous treatments of the subject, using wolf biology, Native American beliefs, and a story from the life of Saint Francis to examine the attitude of humans toward nature. The treatment of wolves serves as an especially notorious example: "Throughout history man has externalized his bestial nature, finding a scapegoat upon which he could heap his sins and whose sacrificial death would be his atonement. He has put his sins of greed, lust, and deception on the wolf and put the wolf to death—in literature, in folklore, and in real life."

Lopez sees this treatment of the wolf as a microcosm of mankind's treatment of the wilderness as a whole. The wolf was trapped and killed because it epitomized the wilderness that settlers sought to tame and replace with farms and ranches. This violence toward the wolf and the wilderness it represents will end only when human beings come to terms with the wilderness in themselves, as Saint Francis suggested, and not simply project it onto something else. This

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admission of what is essentially Original Sin is a necessary step in ending the cycle of violence against the wilderness and beginning to fit the wilderness into a moral framework.

His next book, *Arctic Dreams*, addresses these issues even more directly. In it Lopez argues that unless our civilization finds some way of coming to terms with the land, we will continue to destroy it and impoverish ourselves as a result. Lopez sees the exploitation of the Arctic as an extension of the exploitation of the entire North American continent. This ambitious approach gives the book a far-reaching significance that helps explain why it has become the most influential of all his works.

But the book's visibility and grandiosity also provoked criticism. The same year it was published (1986), the novelist Joyce Carol Oates blasted contemporary nature writing as inspiring "a painfully limited set of responses in 'nature writers'—REVERENCE, AWE, PIETY, MYSTICAL ONENESS." Though she didn't mention Lopez by name, others have leveled similar charges against his work. Last year in the *London Review of Books*, William Fiennes complained of Lopez's weakness for "the vatic note, the ponderous, oracular voice." Such criticisms grow out of Lopez's occasional tendency to see nature as divine, rather than a sign of the divine. "You can get so caught up in the natural that it becomes sufficient for you," said John F. Haught, a professor of theology at Georgetown University and the author of *The Promise of Nature* (1993). "This tendency is present in some nature writing. The reason I object is partly religious and partly scientific. We know from science that the universe is finite, not infinite. And if Saint Augustine is right that we long for the infinite, then that longing cannot be satisfied by the natural world itself. I think Christianity requires that we acknowledge the finitude of nature, but see it as sacramental. It's full of the divine, but not the divine itself."

Lopez's tendency to equate nature with the divine can be seen as an overcompensation for what the writer perceives to be missing in the larger culture. In his book-length essay *The Rediscovery of North America* (1990), Lopez asserts that we must go beyond an obsession with the material wealth of the continent that began with Columbus and begin to appreciate North America for its spiritual wealth if we are ever to feel at home here. Lopez argues that the continent's most valuable resources are not its timber, fur, fish, and mineral wealth, but a sense of belonging on the North American continent.

"What does it mean to be rich?" he asks. "Is it to possess the material, tangible wealth of North America—the gold and the silver, the timber, the fish, and the furs? Or is real wealth, lasting wealth, something else? Most of us, I think, believe that it is something else. We have taken the most obvious kind of wealth from this continent and overlooked the more lasting, the more valuable and sustaining experience of intimacy with it, the spiritual dimension of a responsible involvement with this place."

Though sometimes overly explicit—some might say preachy—about such themes, Lopez's stories resonate with the mystery of wild landscapes and people's remarkable experiences of them. His recent fiction and nonfiction increasingly concern the responsibilities of community, both in regard to human society and the nonhuman world that encompasses it. "The physical setting for human life has to be seen as a component of community," he said. "Once you tear human life out of a physical context, people become the playthings of tyrants. But we must have a moral relationship with the land, rather than an exploitive one."

Ecology is not just about endangered species. It's about community. It's about relationships. You can't have a consumption-based culture unless you have an immoral relationship with nonhuman species.

Though Lopez often describes himself as "a writer who travels," making trips to the Arctic, Antarctica, Africa, and Australia, he continues to cultivate an appreciation for the McKenzie River Valley where he makes his home. He believes that we can get in touch with the larger spiritual dimensions in our lives by coming to know a local landscape and including it in our sense of community. Specific knowledge of a place makes a crucial difference in our own lives, he argues, as well as those of future generations.

Several years ago, Lopez got a chance to do something for his own landscape. A thirty-two-acre parcel of old-growth forest adjacent to his home went up for sale. Local timber companies were on the verge of buying it when he began bidding for the land. After some negotiation, he purchased the entire parcel, putting the land in trust so that it could never be logged or developed. In doing so, he ensured that this small piece of North America, at least, would be preserved not for its material values but for what it offered the spirit, a sense of belonging within the larger fabric of life. Having done his part to protect his corner of the American landscape, Lopez is now free to cultivate an intimate knowledge of it. He does this in part by taking daily walks through the forest surrounding his house. On these walks he often stops and bows deeply, aware of the privileges and responsibilities of his stewardship.

"It's a kind of love—agape—between me and the place," he said of the practice. "I recognize God in the place and I love the place because of it." □

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'A DAY WITHOUT YESTERDAY'

Georges Lemaître & the Big Bang

Mark Midbon

In the winter of 1998, two separate teams of astronomers in Berkeley, California, made a similar, startling discovery. They were both observing supernovae—exploding stars visible over great distances—to see how fast the universe is expanding. In accordance with prevailing scientific wisdom, the astronomers expected to find the rate of expansion to be decreasing. Instead they found it to be increasing—a discovery which has since "shaken astronomy to its core" (*Astronomy*, October 1999).

This discovery would have come as no surprise to Georges Lemaître (1894–1966), a Belgian mathematician and Catholic priest who developed the theory of the Big Bang. Lemaître described the beginning of the universe as a burst of fireworks, comparing galaxies to the burning embers spreading out in a growing sphere from the center of the burst. He believed this burst of fireworks was the beginning of time, taking place on "a day without yesterday."

After decades of struggle, other scientists came to accept the Big Bang as fact. But while most scientists—including the mathematician Stephen Hawking—predicted that gravity would eventually slow down the expansion of the universe and make the universe fall back toward its center, Lemaître believed that the universe would keep expanding. He argued that the Big Bang was a *unique* event, while other scientists believed that the universe would shrink to the point of another Big Bang, and so on. The observations made in Berkeley supported Lemaître's contention that the Big Bang was in fact "a day without yesterday."

When Georges Lemaître was born in Charleroi, Belgium, most scientists thought that the universe was infinite in age and constant in its general appearance. The work of Isaac Newton and James C. Maxwell suggested an eternal universe. When Albert Einstein first published his theory of relativity in 1916, it seemed to confirm that the universe had gone on forever, stable and unchanging.

Lemaître began his own scientific career at the College of Engineering in Louvain in 1913. He was forced to leave after a year, however, to serve in the Belgian artillery during World War I. When the war was over, he entered Maison Saint Rombaut, a seminary of the Archdiocese of Malines, where, in his leisure time, he read mathematics and science. After his ordination in 1923, Lemaître studied math and science at Cambridge University, where one of his professors, Arthur Eddington, was the director of the observatory.

For his research at Cambridge, Lemaître reviewed the general theory of relativity. As with Einstein's calculations ten years earlier, Lemaître's calculations showed that the universe had to be either shrinking or expanding. But while Einstein imagined an unknown force—a cosmological constant—which kept the world stable, Lemaître decided that the universe was expanding. He came to this conclusion after observing the reddish glow, known as a red shift, surrounding objects outside of our galaxy. If interpreted as a Doppler effect, this shift in color meant that the galaxies were moving away from us. Lemaître published his calculations and his reasoning in *Annales de la Société scientifique de Bruxelles* in 1927. Few people took notice. That same year he talked with Einstein in Brussels, but the latter, unimpressed, said, "Your calculations are correct, but your grasp of physics is abominable."

It was Einstein's own grasp of physics, however, that soon came under fire. In 1929 Edwin Hubble's systematic observations of other galaxies confirmed the red shift. In England the Royal Astronomical Society gathered to consider this seeming contradiction between visual observation and the theory of relativity. Sir Arthur Eddington volunteered to

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work out a solution. When Lemaître read of these proceedings, he sent Eddington a copy of his 1927 paper. The British astronomer realized that Lemaître had bridged the gap between observation and theory. At Eddington's suggestion, the Royal Astronomical Society published an English translation of Lemaître's paper in its *Monthly Notices* of March 1931.

Most scientists who read Lemaître's paper accepted that the universe was expanding, at least in the present era, but they resisted the implication that the universe had a beginning. They were used to the idea that time had gone on forever. It seemed illogical that infinite millions of years had passed before the universe came into existence. Eddington himself wrote in the English journal *Nature* that the notion of a beginning of the world was "repugnant."

The Belgian priest responded to Eddington with a letter published in *Nature* on May 9, 1931. Lemaître suggested that the world had a definite beginning in which all its matter and energy were concentrated at one point:

> If the world has begun with a single quantum, the notions of space and time would altogether fail to have any meaning at the beginning; they would only begin to have a sensible meaning when the original quantum had been divided into a sufficient number of quanta. If this suggestion is correct, the beginning of the world happened a little before the beginning of space and time.

In January 1933, both Lemaître and Einstein traveled to California for a series of seminars. After the Belgian detailed his theory, Einstein stood up applauded, and said, "This is the most beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened." Duncan Aikman covered these seminars for the *New York Times Magazine*. An article about Lemaître appeared on February 19, 1933, and featured a large photo of Einstein and Lemaître standing side by side. The caption read, "They have a profound respect and admiration for each other."

For his work, Lemaître was inducted as a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. An international commission awarded him the Francqui Prize. The archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Josef Van Roey, made Lemaître a canon of the cathedral in 1935. The next year Pope Pius XI inducted Lemaître into the Pontifical Academy of Science.

Despite this high praise, there were some problems with Lemaître's theory. For one, Lemaître's calculated rate of expansion did not work out. If the universe was expanding at a steady rate, the time it had taken to cover its radius was too short to allow for the formation of the stars and planets. Lemaître solved this problem by expropriating Einstein's cosmological constant. Where Einstein had used it in an attempt to keep the universe at a steady size, Lemaître used it to speed up the expansion of the universe over time.

Einstein did not take kindly to Lemaître's use of the cosmological constant. He regarded the constant as the worst mistake of his career, and he was upset by Lemaître's use of his super-galactic fudge factor.

After Arthur Eddington died in 1944, Cambridge University became a center of opposition to Lemaître's theory of the Big Bang. In fact, it was Fred Hoyle, an astronomer at Cambridge, who sarcastically coined the term "Big Bang." Hoyle and others favored an approach to the history of the universe known as the "Steady State" in which hydrogen atoms were continuously created and gradually coalesced into gas clouds, which then formed stars.

But in 1964 there was a significant breakthrough that confirmed some of Lemaître's theories. Workers at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey were tinkering with a radio telescope when they discovered a frustrating kind of microwave interference. It was equally strong whether they pointed their telescope at the center of the galaxy or in the opposite direction. What was more, it always had the same wavelength and it always conveyed the same source temperature. This accidental discovery required the passage of several months for its importance to sink in. Eventually, it won Arno Penzias the Nobel Prize in physics. This microwave interference came to be recognized as cosmic background radiation, a remnant of the Big Bang. Lemaître received the good news while recovering from a heart attack in the Hospital Saint Pierre at the University of Louvain. He died in Louvain in 1966, at the age of seventy-one.

After his death, a consensus built in favor of Lemaître's burst of fireworks. But doubts did persist: Did this event really happen on a day without yesterday? Perhaps gravity could provide an alternative explanation. Some theorized that gravity would slow down the expansion of the universe and make it fall back toward its center, where there would be a Big Crunch and another Big Bang. The Big Bang, therefore, was not a unique event which marked the beginning of time but only part of an infinite sequence of Big Bangs and Big Crunches.

When word of the 1998 Berkeley discovery that the universe is expanding at an increasing rate first reached Stephen Hawking, he said it was too preliminary to be taken seriously. Later, he changed his mind. "I have now had more time to consider the observations, and they look quite good," he told *Astronomy* magazine (October 1999). "This led me to reconsider my theoretical prejudices."

Hawking was actually being modest. In the face of the scientific turmoil caused by the supernovae results, he has adapted very quickly. But the phrase "theoretical prejudices" makes one think of the attitudes that hampered scientists seventy years ago. It took a mathematician who also happened to be a Catholic priest to look at the evidence with an open mind and create a model that worked.

Is there a paradox in this situation? Lemaître did not think so. Duncan Aikman of the *New York Times* spotlighted Lemaître's view in 1933: "'There is no conflict between religion and science,' Lemaître has been telling audiences over and over again in this country....His view is interesting and important not because he is a Catholic priest, not because he is one of the leading mathematical physicists of our time, but because he is both." □

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Celia Wren

POINT, CLICK & CHEAT

'War in Heaven,' the computer game

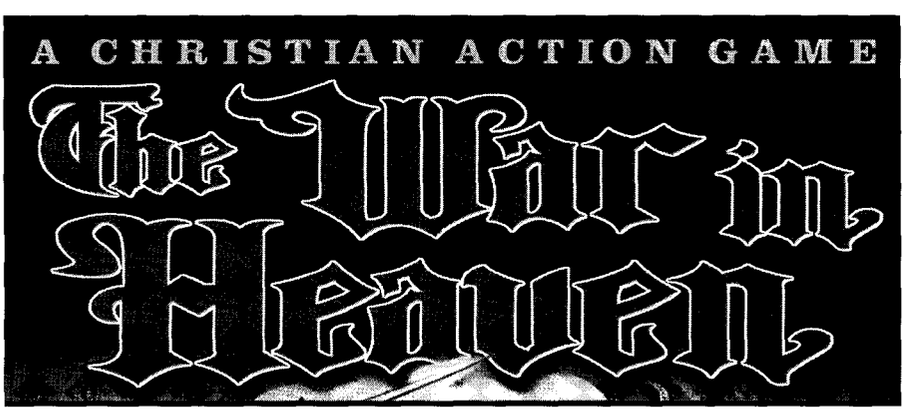
The other week I found myself in Hell, contemplating a giant potbellied frog that shot Day-Glo green lightning bolts into the heights of a blood-red hall.

This is the infernal landscape you meet when you log onto the Christian computer game *The War in Heaven* and join the forces of darkness. Should you have the smarts to ignore the frog and consult a volume flanked by funereal candles a few yards away, you may be able to pass through a dissolving wall, skulk through a pit-ridden labyrinth, and battle with chunky angels whose aim is to boot you back to the game's menu page so you can start all over again.

Despite occasional enigmatic landmarks like a faceless chartreuse lashing tentacle, or a cluster of empty teepees, the dark realms of *The War in Heaven*—at least the ones I had the patience to penetrate—are maddeningly monotonous. The game's Christian creators, Theodore Beale and Andrew Lunstad, have set their minds on higher things than virtual-reality window dressing. Their aim, in launching *War* under the aegis of their software design firm, Eternal Warriors, has been to satisfy computer-game mavens while at the same time providing a little spiritual enlightenment.

This mission is set out clearly on one of the CD-ROM's introductory screens, which announces, "It is our purpose to provide Bible-based entertainment to Christians while at the same time introducing nonbelievers to the eternal truths of the Word of God." To this end, Beale and Lunstad have crafted a software adventure around the idea of "spiritual warfare," a subject whose further complexities they suggest players pursue with the help of a short reading list—the Bible, two books by a Dr. Greg Boyd (evidently the inspiration for the game), and, for intrigued nonbelievers, C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.

Cybersoldiers—that means prospective players—enlisting in *The War of Heaven* can opt to join either the ranks of the divine (using weapons like the Sword of the Spirit and the Trump of Light) or of the fallen angels (try Corruption Spells and the Claw of Abbada). On each side, players forge through twelve levels of difficulty, each incorporating a spiritual lesson—good guys take in fear of the Lord, obedience, faith, forgiveness, righteousness, and love, while demonic conscripts absorb the progressively more distasteful knowledge, disobedience, treachery, corruption, defilement, and murder. Whichever camp the player chooses, the lessons demonstrate "how the one true path of Jesus Christ leads to eternal life, while the other leads inevitably to the destruction of oneself and others."



Tempted by the promise of such theologically edifying diversion, I set out a few weeks ago to learn what *The War of Heaven* had to teach. Choosing sides for the first round was a no-brainer. I had never experienced a computer game before, and the creepy music I unleashed by launching the program—a lugubrious drone like an organ played by Bela Lugosi—preyed upon my beginner's nerves. The prospect of metamorphosing into a satanic foot soldier was more than I could take; I moved the cursor (shaped like a cross) to the gothic letters that spelled "divine" and double clicked. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," observed the text that popped up, reassuring me that I had nothing to fear from the evil spirits I was about to encounter, because the Lord would be with me.

I spent the next twenty minutes or so lurching through a deserted Stonehenge-like meadow, using my mouse to make satisfying whooshing sounds with a sword, before I stumbled on a kind of catacomb. Sallying down a passage, I emerged into a room containing a stone table and, almost instantly, was ambushed by two winged demons wearing what appeared to be green bikinis. In a matter of seconds my numeric health score plummeted to zero and I was ejected back into the Lugosi fugue.

My second attempt ended in a similar bloodbath. "You've got to go around those corners slowly," admonished my brother, whose many talents include superior computer-game skills, as he looked over my shoulder. "Peek around them, in case something's lying in wait." Relying on this advice and the frenzied use of my laptop's space key, which blocked blows from the bikini-clad devils, I passed intact through the first room, penetrated a mysterious, scroll-filled library, and immediately plummeted off a ledge.

I am sorry to report that it was only by incessant cheating—involving a panacea-like computer code that restored me to full health every minute or so—that I eventually navigated past

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demon-cluttered staircases, courtyards, and gardens, eventually reaching a cathedral that awarded me a flashing yellow victory icon for the game's first level. But even cheating could not get me through the second level, damned or divine—I couldn't type that code fast enough, just for starters. Eventually, exasperatingly wedged into a wall near a Tree of Life as a demonic hawk hovered overhead, I gave up on *The War in Heaven*.

The Eternal Warriors company, presumably, did not intend that I would emerge from their game with a new appreciation for cheating. And they probably did not mean to give me such an unnerving vision of the computer-game industry, which, it turns out, fits seamlessly into the web of media that is rapidly trussing up the world. On the software company's Web site (*www.eternalwarriors.com*) you can order Greg Boyd's books from *amazon.com*, read a chatty sermon (by Boyd) about spiritual warfare, and connect directly to the media outlets that have covered *The War in Heaven*. And for those who are still in the book age, a novel version of the game is being published by Pocket Books this spring.

Computer games may require a mind-boggling investment of time and patience, not to mention specialized knowledge ("Peek around those corners") from participants, but they are thriving, as J. C. Herz demonstrates in her witty, eye-opening book *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds*. Herz makes a convincing case that the ethos of computer games is rapidly permeating every aspect of modern life—corporate executives use game-like simulations to evaluate business strategies, for example, and the military feeds off the technological advances of game designers. In fact, Herz's book argues that "videogames are perfect training for life in fin-de-siècle America, where daily existence demands the ability to parse sixteen kinds of information being fired at you simultaneously."

Perfect training for the secular life, perhaps, but not for the life of the spirit. At least not my spirit. □

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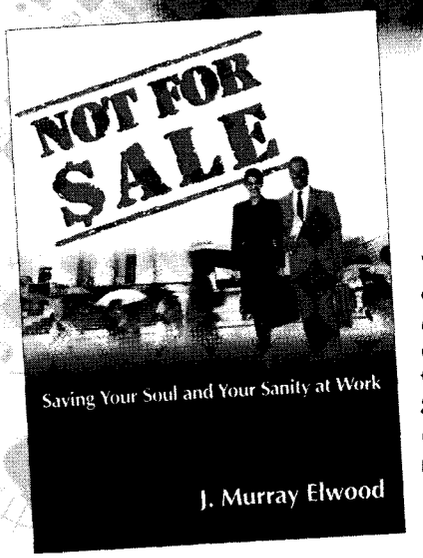

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Can we understand understanding?

The Undiscovered Mind
How the Human Brain Defies Replication, Medication, and Explanation
John Horgan
The Free Press, $25, 325 pp.

John F. Haught

Ten years ago the U.S. Congress designated the 1990s as the Decade of the Brain. Neuroscience and other branches of cognitive science, it seemed to many experts at the time, were well on the way toward unraveling the secrets of human consciousness. Now that the Decade of the Brain has ended, the mystery of mind remains. In fact, John Horgan, a former writer for *Scientific American* and author of the controversial *The End of Science*, argues in this provocative book that the human mind will forever remain a mystery.

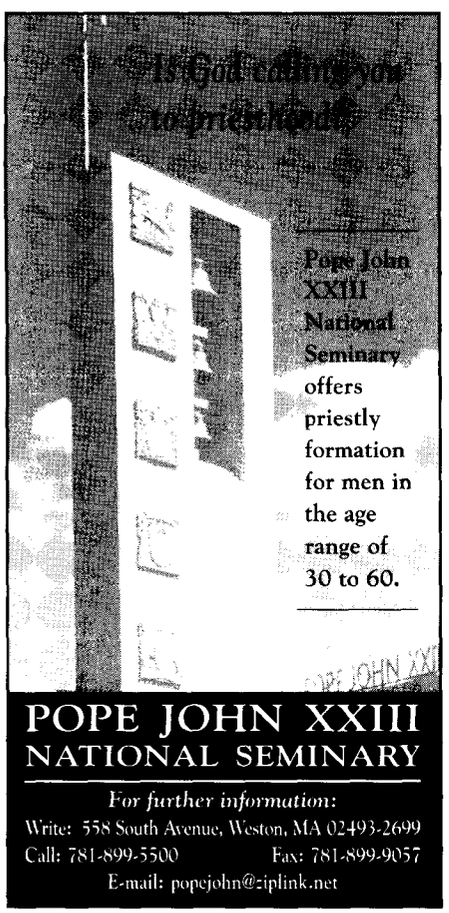
In 1991 philosopher Daniel Dennett's grandiose treatise, *Consciousness Explained* (which, by the way, does not explain consciousness), declared war on all "mysterians." People who continue to believe that the mind is an impenetrable mystery are only frustrating the progress of science, he said. Apparently Dennett had not read G. E. Pugh's remark to the effect that if the brain were simple enough for us to understand it, we would be so simple that we couldn't. Last year, however, even so rationalist a thinker as Colin McGinn grimly concluded, in *The Mysterious Flame*, that the mind and brain will always remain inherently unknowable, out of bounds to scientific elucidation. "I maintain," he wrote, "that we need a qualitative leap in our understanding of mind and brain, but I also hold that this is not a leap our intellectual legs can take."

In *The Undiscovered Mind*, Horgan's own investigation of the various "mind sciences" leads him to the same mysterianism that McGinn reluctantly embraces and that Dennett deplores. For Horgan, as for McGinn, this confession of the limits of science is no reason to celebrate. The lacuna in our understanding of mind is not a victory for the soul or an implicit sanctioning of religious anthropology. Rather it is just a sad and sober fact. We simply do not, and indeed cannot, understand very much about the mind.

Nor do we really know how to heal it. From psychoanalysis to Prozac, Horgan contends, efforts to heal the psyche have scarcely worked any better than placebos. Citing psychiatrist Arthur Shapiro, he seems to agree that the placebo effect may be the primary ingredient in psychotherapy. Interestingly, at a time when Frederick Crews and others have attempted to discredit Freud as a consummate fraud, Horgan is rather soft in his critique of psychoanalysis, since in his view nothing else seems to work much better. At the suggestion of Jerome Frank and Howard Gardner, Horgan advises professional practitioners of the "talking cure" to situate their discipline not in science, but in the field of rhetoric, the art of persuasion. In this setting they will not have to defend their practice against the usual charge of being unscientific.

Horgan's breezy but gripping book is destined to irritate many neuroscientists now working feverishly to understand the brain, as well as the cognitive scientists attempting to comprehend the "mystery" of mind. Moreover, it will be shocking to the many patients who will testify that psychiatry or psychotherapy has restored them to life. Horgan steers clear of interviewing actual patients, however, content to generalize from sheets of statistics and interviews with experts that the entire spectrum of therapies lives on overblown claims of effectiveness.

In spite of its author's insistence that he is not trying to depress his readers, *The Undiscovered Mind* hardly sparkles with optimism. Its general mood is melancholic rather than hopeful. The same tragic resignation that came through in *The End of Science* (a book that sought to douse the notion that the horizon of scientific research extends endlessly ahead)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takes over here once again.

For Horgan the glass is always half-empty. Instead of highlighting the obvious medical improvements that have occurred in the care of the mentally ill, he seems content to focus almost exclusively on the failures of therapy to live up to its hype. The information he provides is not without value, but the reader is forewarned that, for Horgan, the universe is not a place of promise, and he wants to make sure that we realize it.

If he is pessimistic about the results of therapy, Horgan is no more excited about the prospects of cognitive science. Here, however, his sobriety seems more justifiable. In the field of artificial intelligence, for example, even Marvin Minsky and other pioneers are now confessing that earlier dreams about thinking machines were too enthusiastic. If we can never really understand the mind, how can we hope to build one artificially?

Especially significant are Horgan's discussion and evaluation of the new field of evolutionary psychology, an offshoot of E. O. Wilson's sociobiology. Evolutionary psychology attempts to explain all of the features and functions of the mind as results of natural selection for reproductive fitness that culminated in hunters and gatherers. Its devotees seem inordinately confident that Darwin provides the deepest and most fundamental explanation of our mental characteristics. Appropriately, Horgan questions just how rich Darwinian accounts of our mental habits can legitimately claim to be. Evolutionary psychology turns out to be "a strangely inconsequential exercise." It can take almost any kind of social or psychological datum and explain it in Darwinian terms, but it cannot experimentally show that this explanation is better than any others. "Like neuroscientists, researchers in evolutionary psychology and artificial intelligence are both bumping up against the Humpty Dumpty dilemma. They can break the mind into pieces, but they have no idea how to put it together again."

Just how mysterious, then, is the mind? There are, after all, both strong and weak versions of mysterianism. An example of the strong variety is that of Saint Augustine, for whom the mind's elusiveness to intellectual mastery is indicative of our deeply spiritual nature. Horgan's implicitly materialist instincts, however, render his own mysterianism rather weak by comparison. The fact that mind evades complete objectification is not a signal of its irreducibility to mechanics. Our mental freedom is probably illusory, for there must be unspecifiable physical factors that quietly "cause" all of our decisions. For Horgan, "the undiscovered mind" is not an exhilarating doorway to infinite mystery, as it has been for the truly great philosophers of the past. Rather it is just one more dead end, perhaps even a final defeat, for human inquiry. □

John F. Haught *is professor of theology at Georgetown University. His most recent book is* God after Darwin *(Westview).*

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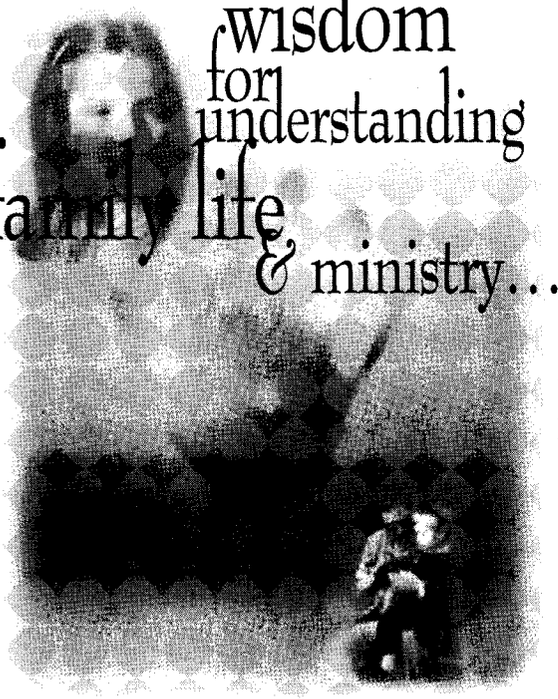

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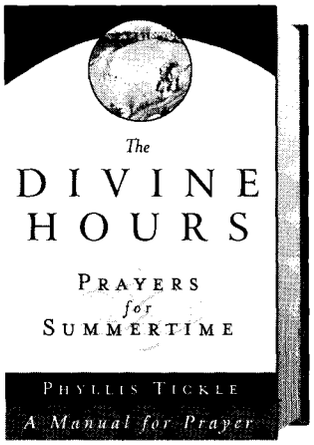

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RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

In the entry on "Doctors of the Church" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* published in 1967, the author assured us that the likelihood of a woman being so honored was slight since women did not exercise the ministry of theological teaching. Three years later Paul VI named Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila doctors of the church. More recently, Pope John Paul II added the name of Thérèse of Lisieux.

The Doctors of the Church
by Bernard McGinn
Crossroad, $17.95, 193 pp.

It is the burden of McGinn's readable volume to describe how the honorific "doctor of the church" grew in the tradition, to provide brief biographies of the thirty-three persons who are called doctors, and, finally, to speculate on the future, and, more tantalizingly, on who could or should be on the list. McGinn points out that in the Middle Ages theologians and preachers referred to the great patristic writers of the past as *doctores* (in the Christian East the reference was to "The Fathers"). The *doctores* had a certain eminence because of the weight assigned to their teaching. The names of Augustine, Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Jerome, as well as Easterners like Gregory of Nyssa and Athanasius, were commonly cited as authoritative theological sources.

It was not until after the Council of Trent that popes began to add new doctors of the church at regular intervals. A Dominican pope declared Thomas Aquinas a doctor of the church in 1568, so it was only natural that a Franciscan pope would name Saint Bonaventure a doctor two decades later. Over a hundred years would pass until a new name (Anselm of Canterbury) would be included in the list. From then the list would grow apace.

One way to assess the importance of the doctors is to look at how frequently they are cited in official teachings. McGinn supplies a handy appendix indicating such citation in the documents of Vatican II and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* The variations are enormous: Thomas Aquinas leads with nearly eight hundred citations, while Augustine is a close second. Alphonsus Liguori is never cited in the documents of Vatican II, although he is cited once in the catechism. Robert Bellarmine gets twenty-nine citations in Vatican II but none in the catechism. Anselm of Canterbury gets but a single citation.

What person will make the list? (This is rather like handicapping the Nobel Prize!) John Henry Newman is cited nearly thirty times in Vatican II and four times in the catechism, which puts him ahead, by my count, of fourteen of the official doctors. McGinn suggests a number of people for possible inclusion. We think of the teaching of doctrine in a more expansive fashion today, so one might include Francis of Assisi or the monastic witness of John Cassian (also suggested by McGinn). I definitely do not think that Louis de Montfort should make the cut because of the oddly rococo Mariology that he espoused, but McGinn likes him. McGinn further resists the notion of an ecumenical "doctor of the church" because, he argues, *doctores* should teach the fullness of the Catholic faith. (I have a soft spot in my heart for John Wesley.)

This is an engagingly written book on a topic little studied. One could learn a good deal about the history of theology from it while finding clues for further reading in McGinn's fine bibliographies. The final chapter also permits one to enter the guessing game with the rules he supplies and, for me, that was great fun.

Alister McGrath, principal of Wycliffe Hall at Oxford University, is one of the

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Christian Spirituality: An Introduction
by Alister McGrath
Blackwell, $28.95, 350 pp.

most prolific theologians writing within the Evangelical tradition. This most recent work is the fruit of six years of teaching spirituality seminars in summer-school sessions on a subject of some urgency for McGrath. As he observed a few years ago, there has been a dearth of solid materials for recently converted Evangelicals seeking to sustain their new Christian lives. *Christian Spirituality* is designed to fill that need. It is always useful for a Catholic to see how the subject of spirituality is treated in other traditions.

McGrath, a veteran textbook writer, knows how to put a cogent book together. He supplies the obligatory introductory material before providing four meaty chapters fashioned in the style of casebooks. Chapter 4 selects a series of theological themes, gives a definition for each, its location in Christian practice, and finally, how it enters into the spiritual life. Chapter 5 does the same for biblical themes while furnishing information on various writers and schools of spirituality related to these various biblical topoi. Chapter 6 assesses the role of visualization in spirituality and its various Christian manifestations.

The final chapter (and the most instructive) uses a series of short, classic spiritual texts—ranging from Gregory of Nyssa down to more modern writers—to show how one might "interrogate" the text while using "selective attention" to avoid getting bogged down in the peripheral details. This method reminds me of the old Puritan formula for preaching a sermon: an expanded consideration of the text, an explanation of its doctrine, and, finally, an application to the life situation. Not a bad formula at all.

I do have three mild criticisms, however. First, McGrath does not seem to have a firm grasp on all of the historical sources. For example, he goes on at some length about John of the Cross and the "dark night of the soul." John, of course, does not talk generically about the dark night of the soul; he speaks, rather, of the dark night of the senses and the dark night of faith. The distinction is important.

Second, McGrath's bibliographies are not comprehensive. He does not cite the now standard volume of the collected works of John of the Cross by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Despite a nice list of Web sites, he neglects to note primary sources available in translation and is unselective about secondary literature.

Third, the relationship of spirituality and social action is not addressed. This may be a result of the author's own Evangelical orientation. The general assumption seems to be that spirituality most concerns the individual; little focused attention is paid to spiritual growth in the context of liturgy and service to the world.

Despite these criticisms, I found much to admire in this work. It could be quite useful for any teacher or stu-

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dent who wishes to learn how to study spirituality with some level of intellectual seriousness. Still, this is a book best read in tandem with works that address areas only lightly touched on here. Gustavo Gutierrez's *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (1983), in which liberation themes are put into dialogue with the life of prayer, worship, and spiritual growth, would be a useful companion volume.

Gutierrez's more recent writings on spirituality can be found in *The Density of the Present.* Here are six essays that

The Density of the Present: Selected Writings
by Gustavo Gutierrez
Orbis, $22, 213 pp.

first saw light either as journal articles or as academic addresses. His 1992 paper marking the fourth centenary of the birth of John of the Cross is an excellent example of how Gutierrez approaches an issue. What can John of the Cross say to the teeming masses of Latin America? Is his doctrine too precious and elitist to be of real use? Gutierrez invites us to look again at the great mystic to relearn some fundamental themes: the utter gratuity of God's love for us; the call to freedom in faith; the power of language; and, finally, joy in the midst of trials. Also included in this volume is a wonderful talk on the relationship between theological language and the human condition. Here, Gutierrez is attentive to both the absence and the presence of God in language (especially literary language) and to the way that Emanuel Levinas grounds ethics in his idea of the "other." These essays (others deal with discipleship, the ecclesial dimension of theology, the concordance of the terms "friends of God" and "friends of the poor") illustrate how a superbly trained theologian can write skillfully about spirituality without appearing either abstract or elitist. To my mind, Gutierrez does this better than most.

Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage
by Charles J. Healey
Alba House, $22.95, 432 pp.

Another book to be read in tandem with McGrath is Charles J. Healey's survey of Christian spirituality. Based on his long experience as a university and seminary professor, this well-written essay takes us from the apostolic fathers down to the period after Vatican II. Healey tells his story chronologically, breaking this pattern only to catch up on spiritual trends outside the Roman Catholic tradition. There he pays attention to Orthodox and Reformation spirituality and also to those traditions (like the Holiness tradition) often glossed over in standard accounts.

Healey provides biographical sketches of the major figures, brief accounts of the cultural matrix within which they lived, and a short analysis of the dominant themes in their writings. There is nothing original in his exposition (he is heavily dependent on standard secondary sources), but neither is there eccentricity or bad judgment. This work

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could well serve as a companion piece for a course in spirituality along with a selection of primary texts. (I do not think it could be used on its own.) Still, the sheer amount of information conveyed can be staggering. That criticism, however, is not meant as a serious one; the book probably ought to be read in small chunks.

Christian Spirituality has a fairly representative bibliography of English-language sources and a more-than-adequate index. For a relatively modest price, one gets, in short, a kind of brief version of the now out-of-print three-volume *The History of Christian Spirituality* written by Louis Bouyer et al.

Reclaiming Spirituality
by Diarmuid O'Murchu
Crossroad, $15.95, 197 pp.

O'Murchu, an Irish priest based in London, is a lover of the big theme. In the limited space of this modest volume he links up creation spirituality, chaos theory, the feminist movement, Jungian archetypes, the new physics, a radical critique of patriarchy, nonjudgmental approaches to sexuality, and various kinds of ecological theory. In contradistinction to these new forms of knowing, he juxtaposes the "guardians of orthodoxy": the stultifying utterances of the magisterium, the rigid moralism of much of Catholicism, etc. In other words, O'Murchu is in full-blown reaction against a Catholicism in which, we presume, he was himself shaped. In his reaction, he does not shrink from identifying himself with "New Age" spirituality.

Announcing a New Age is, of course, hardly a new enterprise. Joachim of Fiore did it in the early Middle Ages. New Age thinking has often veered toward the demonic; think of the Thousand Year Reich or the classless society with its vision of the new Soviet man. O'Murchu, of course, has nothing so apocalyptic in mind. He is, however, quite impatient with the clods and dullards who do not find the Christian tradition hopelessly retrograde. O'Murchu is fed up with "religion" but bullish on "spirituality"—terms which, innocently, he sees as polar opposites. He is out to create great chasms between old and new. Alas, the "new" which he espouses demands a grasp of fractals, quantum theory, chaos theory, and so on. This book, in short, has a feeling of snobbish gnosticism. To be sure, the author includes the obligatory discourse on identifying with the "marginalized," but my suspicion is that those folks could not make heads or tails of this book.

In announcing a "new spiritual vision," O'Murchu eviscerates traditional Christian spirituality through rejection and parody. He is, of course, free to do so. But his book will hardly find a place on any serious bibliography of Christian spirituality. It certainly will find no place on mine. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book is* Thomas Merton and Monastic Wisdom *(Eerdmans).*

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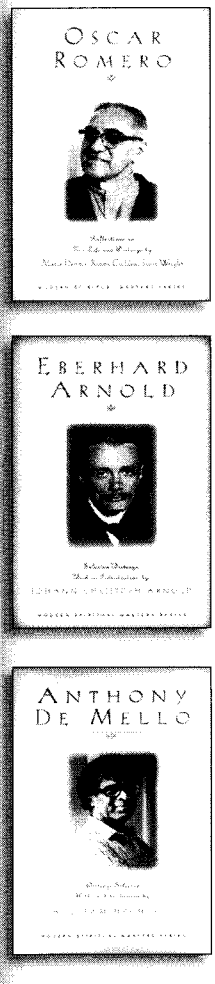

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Saint Mary's have bought heavily into the cult of individualism that plagues our society.

A hallmark of Catholic spirituality is its essential communitarianism. This underlies our entire understanding of being church, of the proper role of government, and of our social-justice obligations. What I observe is a turning toward a more individualistic, private approach to piety and service. I have been deeply troubled by this slippage in our church, having sensed it in several "online" conversations in which I have participated. I am very afraid that if this trend continues and is encouraged by a new crop of "evangelical" priests, we may call our church Catholic but we will no longer be catholic.

ANNA KALUSA
Mesa, Ariz.

The Jesuit College of the South

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Fighting nihilism

The issue of January 28, with the articles "Theology after Darwin" and "Not So Fast, Mr. Wilson," meets urgent intellectual needs for believers, and represents a severely delayed but welcome confrontation with the prevailing nihilism in some posh circles. My only regret is that far too few of those who need such nourishment—and who may not realize it—will ever encounter *Commonweal* at all.

The dynamics of academic stardom can be chilling to watch up close. The appointment of philosopher-ethicist Peter Singer at Princeton and the reign of E.O. Wilson at Harvard are cases in point. For example, last year the Woodrow Wilson Foundation held a symposium to hail Wilson's book *Consilience*. A huge concourse of students, all but gaping with reverence, filled two rooms. And all the man said was that cells are all there is. The Q & A was ritual, with several famous people applauded for showing vital signs.

It has dawned on me late how bad the situation is. I can begin to see what has driven some believing academics out of the big scholarly associations and what is even now fueling a spirit of separatism in some areas of higher education. Much as it pains me to admit it, that mainstream is pretty muddy, and efforts to bring "our" thought into its currents have been only minimally effective. But of course we can't give up. Please press on.

(BROTHER) PATRICK ELLIS, F.S.C.
Baltimore, Md.

For nonviolent offenders

Regarding the portion of the editorial, "Hype, History, and a New Year" [January 14] on criminal justice system policies: an emphatic yes! to your argument that "other ways must be found to deter crime, with drug and alcohol treatment programs as the first alternative for nonviolent offenders." But even before this, early drug-abuse prevention programs are needed, and education on how different substances affect

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different people, the importance of overcoming denial, and the like.

Since alcohol and other drugs lower inhibitions, and since most crimes committed under the influence are in violation of the Ten Commandments, it would seem fitting that churches would be eager to promote alcohol and drug use prevention programs.

ALVERA M. SAMS
Findlay, Ohio

Upsetting, but stimulating

A note of appreciation for the recent years of great writing and stimulating opinions. We do not always enjoy the "outriding" articles, but more than once we have had to admit that our opinion was changed after some reflection. Some of the writers were so upsetting to us that we thought about canceling our subscription. But we returned again and again to find a redeeming review, poem, or article.

For more than thirty years we have enjoyed the work of *Commonweal*'s hands and hearts. We welcomed especially the lucid article by Sidney Callahan, "We're All Original Sinners" [January 28, 2000]. It reminded us of previous pieces by her and other graced souls that changed our opinions, expanded our interests.

Bravo for Richard Alleva, John Garvey, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, and others.

AL AND TERESA KIMMEL
Parkersburg, W. Va.

Good-bye to Mrs. McCarthy

I just want to say that this is one reader who will miss the presence of Abigail McCarthy ["One Last Word," December 17, 1999] now that she has retired from the pages of *Commonweal*. Over the years, I've much appreciated her cogent, often prescient, observations and commentaries on matters social and political, as well as the human condition in general. And I hope we'll still be hearing from her via other journalistic channels.

PATRICIA MacMANUS
New York, N.Y.

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DANIEL A. DOMBROWSKI AND ROBERT DELTETE

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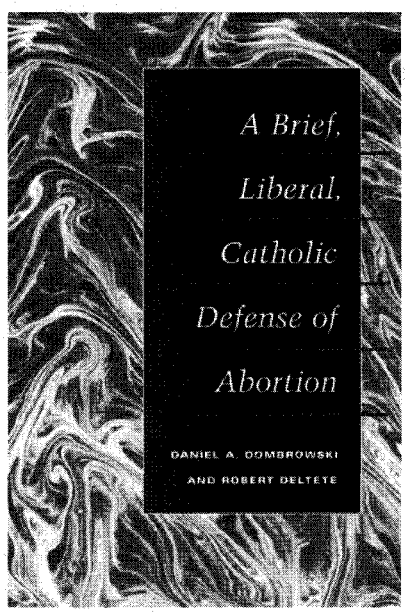

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SOLON, SPARE THOSE TREES

Richard Bauman

Coastal redwood trees are as rare as they are huge. They can have a life span of up to two thousand years and grow to the height of a thirty-five-story building, but exist only in a narrow strip along California's northern coast. In late 1899, Andrew P. Hill, a well-known artist and photographer, was commissioned by a London magazine to photograph the trees. He paid an entrance fee just to get into the Fremont Big Tree Grove, a privately owned stand of giant trees in the Santa Clara Mountains south of San Francisco. When he took pictures of the mammoth trees, however, his photographic plates were confiscated: the grove owners claimed exclusive rights even to photos of the trees. Hill was frustrated and angry. Believing that these natural wonders should belong to everyone, he set his mind on achieving their preservation and public ownership, and soon formed a small group for that purpose. Their first meeting was at Stanford University, and their slogan became, "Save the Redwoods!"

At that first meeting, the fledgling group learned of a much larger grove twenty miles north of the Fremont stand, known as Big Basin. It was a marvelous forest of giant trees, thousands of years old, but located directly in the path of several working sawmills less than two miles away. In May 1900, Hill and a small group of men and women, including Robert Kenna, a Jesuit priest who was president of Santa Clara College (now University), went to see Big Basin. It wasn't an easy trip. They traveled by rail, further by horse-drawn wagons over a steep, rugged mill road that ended at Sempervirens Creek. The group spent several days exploring and taking pictures. It was a wilderness of cathedral-like redwoods, of ferns and huckleberries, oaks and stately firs, and a myriad of flowers and wildlife. One night, gathered around a campfire, the group reaffirmed its commitment to save the area and named themselves the Sempervirens Club.

Later that year, the club got an icy reception from the California legislature when it lobbied for the appropriation of $250,000 to purchase and preserve Big Basin as a state park. The following year the group sent Hill to the state capital to convince lawmakers of the value of Big Basin. Relying on the axiom, "A picture is worth a thousand words," Hill arrived in Sacramento in early 1901 with dozens of photographs. Although he managed to convert a number of influential politicians, including Lieutenant Governor Alden Anderson, to the cause, strong opposition remained. Hill concluded the proposal needed stronger, more concentrated support. Observing that the Catholic members in the Assembly and Senate made up a significant minority in the legislature who typically voted together, he decided to seek out Catholic votes for the park. Not a Catholic himself, he turned to his old high school classmate, Father Kenna, for help. Kenna used his influence with the Catholic legislators to obtain support for the Big Basin Park bill, and was instrumental in getting the "Save the Redwoods" message to Catholic congregations throughout the state, requesting them to write their legislators to support the bill.

As the bill progressed through the legislative process, its opponents were unable to kill the bill, but they succeeded in attaching various conditions, including a last-minute proposal meant to scuttle passage: a private citizen must guarantee $50,000 against the state's possible inability to make the initial payment for the land. Hill, having no idea where the money would come from, nonetheless assured timber owners and legislators that he would have a solid pledge for the money. He raced to see Father Kenna, arriving at his door at midnight. He explained the Assembly's demand to Kenna, who telephoned his nephew, James Phelan. Phelan had given financial support to other worthwhile causes, and now guaranteed the entire $50,000—a huge sum at the time. Soon after, the Assembly passed the California Redwood Park Bill by a vote of fifty-five to one.

Despite the Assembly's approval, just seven of forty senators favored creation of the park. At Hill's request, and with the help of Senator Charles M. Shortridge of San Jose, Kenna was permitted to address the Senate. He later wrote of his speech: "My remarks, though very simple, were given with an earnestness that made the senators accept them as the sentiments of my heart. I said in part...'These redwoods are preeminently Californian, unique in their species and situation....I beg you to stay the hand that would harm those that still remain....'" The subsequent Senate vote was nearly unanimous in favor of the park. As a result, in 1902 the state purchased 3,800 acres in the heart of Big Basin. It remains today an oasis in what has come to be the nation's most populous state.

After the park opened, several of the oldest and tallest trees were given names to honor those who had helped preserve them. The first so named was the Santa Clara Tree, after Santa Clara College and its president, Robert Kenna. Today, the Santa Clara University yearbook is still called the *Redwood*. □

Richard Bauman *is a freelance writer from West Covina, California.*

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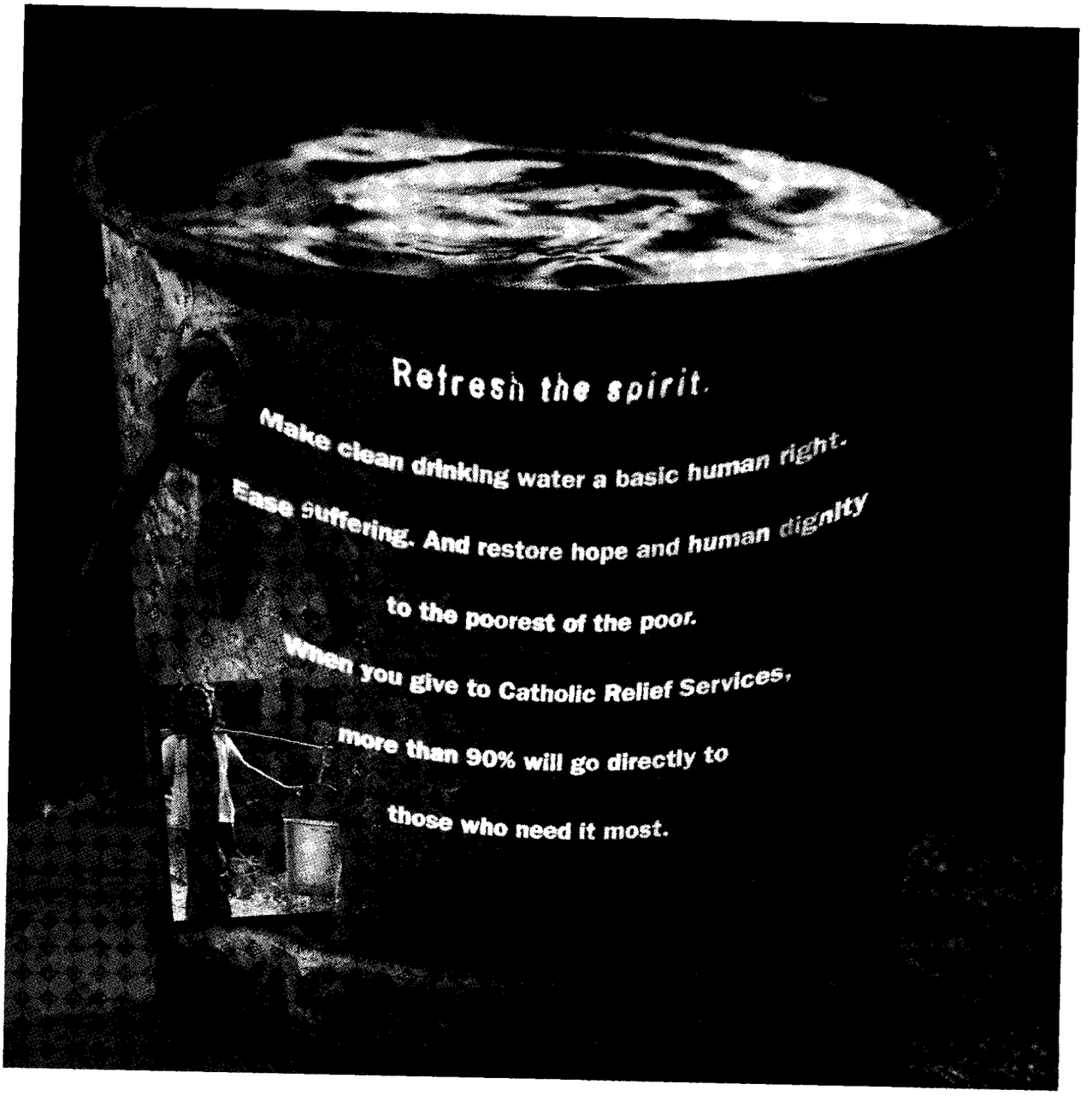
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